

£876

THE DOMINANT SEX

Michael Egan

THE DOMINANT SEX

A Play

In Three Acts

LONDON
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

1935

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To
MARY

The Dominant Sex was first produced at the Embassy Theatre on December 3rd, 1934, and subsequently transferred to the Shaftesbury Theatre on January 2nd, 1935, with the following cast :

<i>Alec Winstone</i>	GEORGE CROSS
<i>Dick Shale</i>	RICHARD BIRD
<i>Angela Shale</i>	DIANA CHURCHILL
<i>Lucy Webster</i>	RENE RAY
<i>Mr. Webster</i>	TOWNSEND WHITLING
<i>Mrs. Webster</i>	RITA DANIEL
<i>Gwen Clayton</i>	ELLEN POLLOCK
<i>Joe Clayton</i>	HENRY HEWITT

Production by JOHN FERNALD

CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

ALEC WINSTONE

DICK SHALE

ANGELA SHALE (his wife)

LUCY WEBSTER

MR. WEBSTER (her father)

MRS. WEBSTER (her mother)

GWEN CLAYTON

JOE CLAYTON (her husband)

SCENES

ACT I

SCENE : The Shales' flat in Bayswater.

TIME : The present. An afternoon in April.

ACT II

SCENE : The same as Act I.

TIME : The same evening.

ACT III

SCENE I : An all-electric house in Blissboro.

TIME : A few months later.

SCENE II : The same.

TIME : About one year later.

ACT I

The scene is a living-room of a third-floor flat in Bayswater ; comfortable but unpretentious, with a few modern touches. It is a " converted " flat, with a tiny hall which juts into the room, the entrance-door being in the left side of the hall. A door, down right, to bedroom ; another, up left, to a small kitchen. Window in back wall, left of hall. A corridor running off-stage right of hall. Fireplace right wall centre.

TIME : *The present. Late afternoon in April.*

DICK SHALE and ALEC WINSTONE are discovered at the rise of the curtain. DICK is about twenty-eight, sturdy, determined, slightly uncouth in his manner. ALEC is thirty-two, tall, rather polished and overdressed, with keen features and an alert manner : the semi-successful business man. They are both standing, discussing with keen interest a small electric motor which ALEC holds in his hand. It has no " casing " on it and is about the size of a large duck's egg.

ALEC (*holding up motor*) : Yes, I'm inclined to agree. Properly handled it should make a fortune. I'd never have believed it possible that an electric motor could be so small. It's a miracle to me. You've got a real property here.

DICK : Actually it's about half the size of the smallest motor on the market at present—of the same power ; and only three-quarters as heavy. Two important advantages.

ALEC : Sure ! You've got your patents covered ?

DICK : Oh, yes.

ALEC : And all you want is capital—three thousand, eh ? (*Puts down motor and walks about excitedly.*) Yes, I believe I can do it. I'll raise the best part of it anyway—I'll spring five hundred myself. You haven't shown it to anyone else, by the way ?

DICK : No—except the old bird downstairs.

ALEC : Who ?

DICK : Our landlord : he lives on the ground floor. I thought at one time he might be interested ; but lately—(*breaks off with a smile*)—it's rather strange.

ALEC : How ?

DICK : For about a week now he and his wife have been avoiding us like the plague. Been damned rude, in fact.

ALEC : What have you been up to ?

DICK : That's what Angela and I keep asking ourselves.

ALEC (*takes his hat and neatly rolled brollie*) : Well, I'd better beat it if I'm to catch this chap Marks before he leaves his office. I'm not making any promises, but he *should* be good for a thousand.

DICK : I'll get out some rough figures of production costs before you come back. I think I can get the weight down a bit more without losing efficiency. I'm going to make a new model when I've tried out a different kind of bearing.

ALEC : How long will that take ?

DICK : A month or six weeks perhaps. I only get the evenings for working on it : the shop keeps me busy during the day.

ALEC : Aha. I often meant to run over and see the new wireless shop. How's business ?

DICK : Pretty good. It's only a small place, with a little workroom at the back where I tinker about with the motor.

ALEC (*going to door*) : Well, I'll cut along, Dick, and see Marks, and if I can sell him the idea I'll fix up for you to meet him. I can tell you this : you've got a real property there. If we handle this right you'll be controlling one of

the biggest electrical firms in the country soon (*going*).

DICK (*his expression changes suddenly*) : Oh—wait a moment. We'd better be clear about this.

ALEC : Eh ?

DICK : I have no ambition in that direction. Once the motor is established on the market I shall sell my interest in the company—as soon as I can get a good enough price.

ALEC : Oh ! You mean—you're only out to make a packet quickly ?

DICK : Yes. I—I want to buy a farm.

ALEC : A what ?

DICK : I want to show that farming can be made as good an investment as anything else.

ALEC : Show who ?

DICK : Everyone. Farmers—politicians—investors. I thought you knew I was a farmer ?

ALEC : I knew you *were* a farmer—or a farmer's son—but I thought you finished with that years ago.

DICK : Farming finished with *me* years ago when my father went bankrupt and our farm was sold over our heads.

ALEC : Oh—bad luck. (*Mildly mocking*) And now that you see a chance of making a pile you think you'll go back and have another shot ?

DICK : I always meant to go back. I only came to London to study.

ALEC : But got lured into making a fortune out of electricity, eh ?

DICK : I came to study electricity—and save money.

ALEC : But—what's the point of studying electricity if you always meant to take up farming again ?

DICK (*crosses restlessly to the window*) : Farming will never recover under the old conditions, with the old methods. My father's farm was only one of hundreds all over the country that are failing because farmers have neither the courage nor the money to bring them up to date—and work them with modern scientific equipment. Electricity will be the salvation of farming.

ALEC : Oh ! So that's the idea ! Electricity on farms, eh ? Isn't that rather a dream ?

DICK (*shrugs*) : It only needs someone to show the way.

[*The sound of a latch-key in the door. ANGELA enters, with a little parcel. She is twenty-four, slim, fair, pretty, with an independent manner. She is a typical, though still relatively rare, feminine product of the age : self-willed, unsentimental, with a ruthless conviction that men and women are "equal."* She does not see ALEC when she first enters.

ANGELA : Hello, darling ; sorry I'm late. They kept me at the office, and I did a little shopping on the way home. (*They kiss warmly.*) And what do you think ? That old cow downstairs banged the door in my face again !

DICK : No ! (*Turning her round*) A visitor.

ANGELA : Alec ! Where on earth have you sprung from ?

ALEC (*shaking hands*) : Hello, Angela. How are you ?

ANGELA : Where have you been these ages ?

ALEC : Oh, sculling round the country on business.

ANGELA : Well, what a surprise ! It must be quite six months since you looked us up.

DICK : He didn't. We ran into each other by accident. He's coming back to supper.

ANGELA : Oh, good. I warn you it's only liver

and bacon, and a spot of cheese perhaps ; and, if you're very good, a glass of beer.

DICK (*indicating parcel*) : What's this ?

ANGELA : Oh, darling, *such* a bargain—I must show you.

[*Rips open parcel and produces frock.*]

DICK (*surprised*) : You've changed the blue one then ?

ANGELA (*laughs*) : Darling, don't be so sweet ! The "blue one" that I got last week was an evening frock.

DICK : Oh ? What's this then ?

ANGELA (*going to mirror, holding the frock against her*) : This is just a cheap little semi-evening thing for wearing at home. (DICK and ALEC exchange the baffled glances of mere males.) You don't think I'd be so extravagant as to buy two evening frocks two weeks running ?

ALEC (*to DICK, mock serious*) : Don't be ridiculous, man.

ANGELA : As a matter of fact, I gave myself this for being a very clever girl. I've got a surprise for you, darling. I had a brain-wave to-day about the motor (*throwing frock aside*). I expect you've been hearing all about it, Alec ; don't you think it's a marvellous motor ?

ALEC : I certainly do.

DICK : What's the brain-wave ? I've had one too.

ANGELA : You have ? Oh, you go first, darling !

DICK : I believe I can raise the capital to manufacture it myself.

ANGELA (*surprised*) : But—I thought we'd agreed to sell it outright ?

DICK (*to ALEC*) : We *had* thought of selling the patent outright to one of the big firms, for a lump sum——

ANGELA : Don't you think that's much wiser, Alec ?

ALEC : Not on your life. They'd only give you a fraction of what it's worth.

ANGELA : Well, even that would be better than nothing. And it might *be* nothing if we tried to compete with the big firms and went smash— (*Door-bell rings and she goes to answer it.*) I believe in safety first. The small man hasn't a chance these days—

[*She opens door to* LUCY WEBSTER : *a graceful, good-looking girl of about eighteen, but the absence of "make-up" deprives her of any conventional prettiness. ANGELA is rather fond of her, as she shows by her cheery greeting.*

Hello, Lucy !

LUCY : Hello. May I speak to you for a moment ?

ANGELA : Of course.

LUCY (*enters and sees ALEC*) : Oh, I'm sorry. I want to speak to you privately. It's about father and mother—they're coming up to see you.

[ANGELA and DICK exchange glances.

ALEC (*to DICK*) : I'll beat it. I'll be back under the hour. (*Goes.*)

LUCY : I'm awfully sorry for barging in like this. It's—I only want to warn you—oh, I don't know how to tell you !

ANGELA (*sitting*) : Sit down, my dear.

LUCY : I mustn't. They'll be up any minute now. They're getting ready. I—I expect you've noticed they've been queer lately ?

ANGELA : I should think we have ! They were both so *nice* before.

LUCY : They *are* nice really. It's only that they're—well, I suppose old-fashioned. You see, father has worked terribly hard all his life and—well, they never read books or anything and—they're terribly strict about conventions.

DICK : But what's the trouble ?

LUCY (*blurring it out*) : Well, they think you're not really married ! Mother says you're living in sin and she wants father to turn you out. I'm awfully sorry. I'm not supposed to know really, but I heard them talking about it—so I thought I'd warn you—if it's true, I mean.

ANGELA : It's awfully sweet of you, Lucy. I suppose you'd be terribly shocked if it *was* true ?

LUCY (*nonplussed*) : Well—I—I suppose I would in a way—although—well, I'm in such a muddle lately—about things like that, I mean. (*Going*) I mustn't let them catch me here. I'll come up later to hear what happens, may I ?

ANGELA : Of course.

LUCY : Good-bye ! (*Goes.*)

ANGELA : That's that. (*Starts tidying the room.*)

DICK : Mm ! Awkward. I wonder where they got hold of it ?

ANGELA : I should worry.

DICK : It's a pity to upset the old couple.

ANGELA : It's not our fault if they go nosing out what doesn't concern them. It's none of *their* business.

DICK : I know, but we've got to remember—they have their ideals.

ANGELA : Darling, so have *we* !

DICK : Of course.

ANGELA : What's more, they are at least *practical* ideals—not a lot of taboos handed down from the Ark.

DICK : But we must make allowances for their age—and—well, their different moral outlook.

ANGELA : Certainly, if they'll make allowances for *our* age and *our* different moral outlook. But *do* they ? Old people to-day are always bleating about the intolerance of the younger generation,

but they're fifty times more intolerant themselves. And it's they who ought to be more *tolerant*, with their longer experience of life.

DICK (*amused*) : Sounds logical. Hope they see it like that.

ANGELA : Darling ! You're not going to crawl to them as though we're ashamed of our ideals? *I'm* jolly well not. Anyway they'll get a shock when they hear the *whole* truth. I'd wave my marriage lines under their noses if I knew where I'd put the things. (*Searches in drawers of bureau.*)

DICK (*helpfully*) : What are they like ?

ANGELA : Rather like a birth certificate—I think.

DICK : What's that like ?

ANGELA : Oh, damn the thing. (*Abandons search.*)

DICK : You heard what the kid said—about being turned out ?

ANGELA : Oh, they won't turn us out when they hear we have our "lines" : don't worry, darling.

DICK : I'm not. On the contrary, it might suit us—in view of our talk at breakfast. Thought any more about it ?

ANGELA (*smiles fondly at him*) : I've hardly thought of anything else. (*Crosses to him.*)

DICK : That means you agree ?

ANGELA : I feel it will be very naughty of us, darling. We did say we'd wait two years and we haven't been married one year yet. And babies are terribly expensive. Chucking my job, too, would mean three pounds a week less.

DICK : Never mind that. Having an infant will be worth much more than three pounds a week.

ANGELA : Will it ?

DICK : You know it will.

ANGELA : Oh, darling, of course I do. (*They kiss.*)

DICK : Now—about this flat. One snag is that it's so far from my workshop. I waste two good hours a day on that double journey, apart from waste of energy——

ANGELA : Well, darling, you shouldn't *do* it. You're killing yourself working on that wretched little motor. It's the going back in the evenings ; it was nearly two o'clock when you got in this morning, and you were absolutely fagged out.

DICK : Yes, I felt dead beat last night : I'd have dossed there if I had a bunk. As a matter of fact, I've thought of rigging one up.

ANGELA : What ? A *bed*—in your workshop ?

DICK : I mean for the nights when I work extra late. I could doss there——

ANGELA (*determined not to take him seriously*) : Oh, could you ! And leave me to doss by myself, all alone, all night ?

DICK : Well, it can't be much fun for you, my coming home late and waking you up at all hours——

ANGELA (*laughs and kisses him on the mouth*) : It would be less fun for me if you *didn't* wake me up. So don't let me hear any more funny stories about staying out all night, darling. That *would* be the beginning of the end. Your work claims you much too much as it is.

[*A ring at the door. They both make amused grimaces and ANGELA goes to open it. MR. and MRS. WEBSTER are there.*]

WEBSTER (*gloomily*) : Evenin'.

ANGELA (*cheerfully*) : Good evening.

WEBSTER : We'd like to have a word with yourself and Mr. Shale if you can spare a minit.

ANGELA : Certainly. Do come in.

[MR. WEBSTER *stands aside for his wife to enter. She rather sweeps in.* WEBSTER is a heavily built man of sixty-five, with large knobbly hands and kind, tired eyes. He has obviously risen from the labouring classes after many years of dogged and successful toil. His wife is a rather plump person of fifty-eight, very clean and neat.

(To MRS. WEBSTER) : Good evening.

MRS. WEBSTER (*darkly*) : Good evening.

WEBSTER (*to DICK*) : Evenin' !

DICK : Good evening.

ANGELA : Won't you sit down ? It's *so* nice of you to come and see us.

[*They arrange themselves in embarrassed silence.*]

WEBSTER (*clears his throat*) : It's not what you might call a social visit, I'm sorry to say.

ANGELA : No ? Never mind, we're delighted to see you again. We seem to keep missing each other on the stairs lately.

MRS. WEBSTER (*to her husband*) : Tell them, Ned. The letter.

WEBSTER : Aye, here's the point. (*Draws letter from inside pocket.*) It's a letter I had from Miss Malley, your last landlord. You'll remember mebbe that when you took this flat you gave me her name as a reference, and I'll not deny she gave you a very *good* reference. But this letter tells a different story, for in it she says she only discovered the truth about you last week. (*Is about to read the letter, but pauses.*) First I want to say this. If what she says is true, it'll be a big surprise to me, an' a bigger disappointment. For I liked you both. I'll not deny I'd be sorry to lose you as tenants. The first day you came to look over this flat we judged you to be as nice a young married couple as we'd seen in years. But this letter says—you're *not* married.

ANGELA (*indignantly*) : She wrote to tell you that ?

WEBSTER (*hopeful that this means a denial*) : Aye, she did.

ANGELA : Of all the impudence !

MRS. WEBSTER (*hopeful too, smiles*) : There now.

WEBSTER : It's a lie, then ?

ANGELA : I hope you told her to mind her own damn business.

WEBSTER : Eh ? Well, it's natural you'd be offended, I suppose ; but mebbe she meant no malice. If she thought it was true——

ANGELA : But what's it got to do with her ?

WEBSTER : Eh ? D'you mean—— ? You're not denyin' it then ?

ANGELA : Denying it ? Why should we ?

[WEBSTER *turns to* DICK.]

DICK : Yes. We lived together.

WEBSTER : Without bein' married ?

DICK : Yes. At that time we——

ANGELA (*cutting in*) : What on earth has it got to do with anyone but ourselves ?

MRS. WEBSTER : Oh !

WEBSTER (*puts letter away slowly*) : In that case there'll be no need to read the letter.

ANGELA (*flippantly*) : Oh, do let's hear what she says. I'll bet she calls it " living in sin."

MRS. WEBSTER : Oh !

WEBSTER (*looks hard at ANGELA*) : Aye, she does that. An' I'd have you know it's what I call it too : livin' in blackest sin.

ANGELA : How sweet. Is that all you have to tell us ?

WEBSTER (*rising*) : That's all ! An' this : you'll oblige me by leavin' this flat at once. You came here under false pretences an' I have no hesitation in turnin' you out——

DICK : Aren't you being rather high-handed ?

WEBSTER : An' if I am, have you anybody to blame but yourselves ? I'd never have believed it of a young man of your character. (*To ANGELA*) No, nor of you either, in spite of the brazen way you're confessin' to it.

DICK : But surely you allow some freedom of judgment to—well, to people of character, as you say we are. We have our own standards of right and wrong.

ANGELA : *We* don't presume to criticise *your* standards.

WEBSTER (*to DICK*) : Aye, 'tis easy to justify immorality nowadays, I'll grant you that. Young people to-day seem to think vices can be made virtues by just turnin' the words round. But I judge people as I find 'em, an' if——

ANGELA : That's just what you *don't* do, apparently.

DICK : Yes, you said just now you always found us quite decent.

WEBSTER (*confounded for the moment*) : That's as may be.

MRS. WEBSTER : We judge people as we find them *out*.

WEBSTER : Aye ; you didn't tell us you were livin' in sin.

ANGELA : But we weren't. You see, we don't call it living in sin ; we call it trial marriage, or companionate——

WEBSTER : Aye, you would have a fancy name for it.

ANGELA : But don't you see : if two people want to test their love for each other before they get mar——

WEBSTER : Love ! Much right a woman like you has to talk of love !

MRS. WEBSTER : You don't know the meaning of the word !

WEBSTER : No, nor ever likely to !

ANGELA : If you're trying to be insulting——

DICK (*roused to take her part*) : I think I'm the best judge of that. You may be entitled to your own views on marriage, but it doesn't mean you have a monopoly of love. Good Christians aren't the only people capable of loving, you know.

WEBSTER (*weighs it for a moment*) : Aye, mebbe you're right. Mebbe 'tis just that you don't realise the grievousness of the sin you're committin'. Have you no fear for the consequences ? What'll happen to *her* when you get tired of her ?

ANGELA (*laughs*) : But *I* may get tired of *him* first.

WEBSTER : Whichever way it happens, it's *you* that'll suffer, an' you know it. What decent man'll want you when he's finished with you ?

ANGELA : Lots, I should imagine. *He* wanted me after another man had finished with me—or, rather, after I had finished with another man.

WEBSTER (*aghast*) : What's that ? (*Turns to DICK.*)

ANGELA : Oh, he knows. We'd both had *affaires* before we'd ever met ; but, being sensible, intelligent people, we didn't let that worry us when we felt we really loved each other.

WEBSTER : Are you tellin' me you've given yourself in sin to other men besides him ?

ANGELA : You needn't make them sound like a battalion. Only one other—and he only lasted three months.

MRS. WEBSTER : Oh, shame on you !

WEBSTER : You wicked, vicious woman !

ANGELA (*smiles innocently*) : But why ? Why blame me if you don't blame him ? These are days of sex equality ; and if a man can have *affaires*——

DICK : You'd better hear the whole truth. The fact is——

WEBSTER : I'll hear no more ! How dare you stand there, the pair of you, confessin' to such abominations !

ANGELA : We're only trying to show you that you're a little bit out of date. Men aren't such half-wits to-day as you seem to think. The virgin complex is quite dying out——

WEBSTER : May God forgive you for such wanton talk !

MRS. WEBSTER : *And* punish you !

ANGELA : I suppose you think we both ought to boil with jealousy because we've had sex experience with other people ? Sex jealousy is dying out too, you know——

WEBSTER : Stop, I say ! I'll not listen to such talk !

MRS. WEBSTER : Come, dear ! (*Moves to door.*)

ANGELA (*collecting her things from settee*) : Of course—I forgot. Your generation can't bear the mere sound of the word "sex" : it terrifies you, doesn't it ?

WEBSTER : Silence, woman ! You'll leave this house, the pair of you ! (*To Dick*) D'you hear me ?

DICK : Mr. Webster, perhaps if you'd hear *me* instead of raving at my wife, you'd——

WEBSTER : Wife ! Don't insult the name of wife by calling it to this—this——

DICK : She *is* my wife.

ANGELA (*sweetly*) : We're married now, you see. (*To MRS. WEBSTER*) He made an honest woman of me before we came here. (*She takes her coat and hat and the "semi-evening thing" to the bedroom.*) Sorry to spoil your juicy bit of scandal. (*Exit.*)

WEBSTER (*to his wife*) : You hear this ?

MRS. WEBSTER (*stiffly*) : I *hear* it.

DICK : But you don't believe it ?

MRS. WEBSTER : Believe it or not, it doesn't alter what *has* been—if there's no repentance (*with a glance after ANGELA*).

WEBSTER (*to DICK*) : You're tellin' me the truth ?

[ANGELA returns and crosses to kitchen.

DICK : Yes, our trial marriage was a success—(*enter ANGELA*)—so we made it permanent——

ANGELA (*as she passes MRS. WEBSTER*) : So it's all *quite* pure now. I've lost my "lines"—but you'll get all the dirt from the Paddington Registry Office. (*Exit to kitchen.*)

MRS. WEBSTER : Come, dear, there's no more to be said. (*Opens door.*)

WEBSTER (*hesitates : to DICK*) : I'll not deny it makes a difference—although it doesn't wipe out the sins of the past. If you're really married now——

MRS. WEBSTER : Being married means little when there's no shame for what *has* been. (*Another glance after ANGELA.*)

WEBSTER : Mebbe : mebbe not. (*To DICK*) I'll grant you 'tis no real concern of ours what you've done in the past——

MRS. WEBSTER : It's every concern of ours, Ned.

WEBSTER (*sharply*) : You'll please to leave me speak my own mind ! (*To DICK*) But I'll have to think it over a little while.

ANGELA (*appearing at kitchen door, tying on apron*) : Please don't bother. We've been meaning to leave in any case.

WEBSTER : Eh ? (*Turns to DICK*) You have ?

DICK (*to WEBSTER*) : Well—this flat isn't as convenient as we hoped. For one thing, I waste a lot of time travelling backwards and forwards to my workshop.

ANGELA (*to MRS. WEBSTER*) : You'll excuse me, won't you, if I get on with my wifely duties ? (*Clears table.*)

WEBSTER (*to DICK*) : I see. Well, you know your own business best, no doubt. But I'll be surprised if you find a more convenient flat than this—as good a flat at the same price, that is. However——

ANGELA : I shouldn't have thought you'd be interested, after all the “ abominations ” you've heard.

WEBSTER (*looks at her with a faint gleam of humour*) : Aye, you're enjoyin' your victory. You've turned the tables, eh ? Well, I am interested, for I've always liked the pair of you, as I said at the start, an' I'm more than glad to know everything's properly settled between you now. (*MRS. WEBSTER marches impatiently from the room. To DICK*) Mebbe you'll look in below some time for a chat.

DICK : Yes, I'll know more in a day or two.

ANGELA (*sweetly*) : We'll “ think it over.”

[WEBSTER cocks his eye at her ; then, with a nod to DICK, follows his wife. ANGELA puts out her tongue after him.]

ANGELA : That's taught *him* where he gets off.

DICK : I think you were just a little bit naughty, Angela.

ANGELA : Yes ; but I couldn't help it.

DICK (*dropping into armchair*) : The question now is : what are we going to do about it ?

ANGELA : Don't worry, darling. I only said we were going because he was being so damn' cocky. There's no hurry really. I needn't give up my job for months yet. And if you'll only be sensible and not go to the workshop so much——

DICK : Not give up your job ?

ANGELA : Well, I *needn't*—not for three or four months anyway. You surely don't want me to go all domestic straight away ?

DICK (*after a pause*) : Yes, I do.

ANGELA (*sits on the arm of his chair*) : Isn't that being just a wee bit selfish ?

DICK (*takes her hand*) : You don't realise what it would mean to me to have a home.

ANGELA : A *home* ?

DICK : Yes, a real home. I know this is a home—of a kind—but——

ANGELA : But not a real home. What *is* a real home ?

DICK : A real home is a home with *you* in it. Often when I get back first and find no one here, I feel—well, it's hard to explain—it would be different if you *were* here, that's all. Don't you see, darling, it's the—the *atmosphere* of home—having a background to life—that means so much ?

ANGELA : Have you thought what it would be like for me, being alone all day with nothing to do and no one to talk to ? Except Gwen occasionally when she comes to town.

DICK : Well—yes—I suppose it would be a bit strange at first—but Joe and Gwen may be coming to live in town presently.

ANGELA : No, they've washed that out. Gwen likes the Garden City too much. They're moving into one of the new all-electric houses on the estate. And I was thinking this morning that if I did chuck my job and settle down to domestic bliss I'd like to be near Gwen. After all, she's my best friend—she's really the only woman friend I've got.

DICK : You mean—live in Blissboro ?

ANGELA : Yes. I think it would do *you* good too. It wouldn't really mean any more travelling—there's a marvellous service of electric trains—and you'd get some country air—anyhow in the week-ends.

DICK (*thinks about it*) : Mm. It wouldn't be so convenient in some ways—although—yes, perhaps I could rig up some kind of workshop if we had a spare room——

ANGELA : And that reminds me, darling : my brain-wave about the motor. You know Gwen used to be secretary to one of the directors of the International Electric Company before she was married ; well, it suddenly occurred to me that if she could wangle a personal introduction for you it would be much better than just blowing in on spec to see them. So I rang her up from the office——

DICK : Sorry to spoil a good brain-wave, darling, but—I expect you'll be disappointed—I've been thinking it over and I've decided not to sell the patent. I'm going to manufacture the motor myself.

ANGELA (*rises and moves away*) : Oh, Dick, you haven't seriously gone back to that idea ?

DICK : I never seriously gave it up. I admit you used to shake me sometimes——

ANGELA : But I don't understand—I thought we'd settled that? We *agreed* it would be safer to sell it outright to one of the big firms.

DICK : Yes, I know, darling, but——

ANGELA : And, as Joe said all along—and he knows what he's talking about—in these days of trusts and combines the small man hardly stands an earthly.

DICK (*smiles*) : Perhaps I don't regard myself as a small man. Anyway, I'm certain that if I can raise the capital to manufacture it myself I'll make far more than any firm would ever offer me for the patent——

ANGELA : But, darling, there's no harm in *seeing* what the International Electric would offer you.

DICK (*rising, firmly*) : There's no *point* in seeing if I don't intend to accept their offer—assuming they made me one.

ANGELA : I can't understand you, Dick. Surely it would be safer to make sure of *something* by selling to one of——

DICK : Oh, yes, it would be “safer”——much “safer.”

ANGELA : Why do you say it like that?

DICK (*rather irritably*) : Because I feel like that. Because I'm tired of this—this safety first policy. Damn it all, we're still young—we have our lives before us—if we can't take a little risk now we'll get nowhere.

ANGELA (*mildly*) : All right, darling, there's nothing to get het up about : I'm only trying to understand. I suppose I *may* offer an opinion?

DICK : Opinions are all very well ; but we've discussed this often enough ; you shouldn't try to argue me out of the course I've decided on. A man must make the final decisions in planning his own life.

ANGELA : So must a woman, darling. But I didn't flare up just now when you were trying to argue me out of *my* course. (DICK looks puzzled) To chuck my job and have a baby.

DICK (*with unconscious superiority*) : Hardly the same thing.

ANGELA : Just as important though, to me. Bearing children and rearing a family is not all fun, you know.

DICK : Anyway, I don't want Gwen to interfere in this.

ANGELA : I don't see what great harm it can do if she——

DICK : That's not the point. I'm not suggesting it would do great harm. I merely say——

ANGELA (*snappily*) : Then what's all the damn fuss about ? Good God, anyone would think I'd tried to ruin you instead of trying to help you.

[*A pause.*]

DICK (*crosses to her*) : Angela, listen. I want you to realise that this is my *chance*—to make money quickly and get back to my own life. (*More gently, putting his hands on her shoulders*) You do want to help me, don't you ? I need your help—I'm counting on it. I *can* count on it—(*takes her in his arms*)—can't I ?

ANGELA (*softened*) : Oh, Dick, you *know* I want to help you.

DICK : Of course I know . . . darling. (*They kiss.*)

ANGELA : I only want you to do what will be best in the long run. But you're so impulsive, Dick. I do think you get carried away too easily sometimes——

DICK : Possibly ; but impulses can carry one in the right direction sometimes. Listen, darling. (*Sits on settee and draws her down beside him.*) Think what it will mean if I succeed. Instead of

having to save up for another four or five years, as I thought I would at one time, I may make enough in one year to buy a really fine farm—a better farm than I ever hoped I could buy. (*With growing enthusiasm.*) A farm like Long Meadow perhaps—if there is another farm to equal it in the country——

ANGELA (*smiles*) : Which there isn't, apparently.

DICK : I wish you'd seen it, Angela ; you'd understand why I go off the deep end about it sometimes. I was only thinking to-day, this is the time of year when it's at its best. April ! I think I can remember every April at Long Meadow since I could crawl ! Mother used to say her idea of heaven was Long Meadow in early spring.

ANGELA (*won by his enthusiasm*) : Oh, Dick, you *must* take me to see it some day.

DICK (*reminiscently*) : I remember the last April before we sold up. We were still lambing—and one filthy wet night a couple of ewes dropped twins within two seconds of each other. You can imagine what four newly born lambs in a heap look like—all legs——

ANGELA : Sweet !

DICK : —in the pouring rain too. I can see the little blighters now—it was just before dawn—floundering around the pen, up to their skinny knees in mud. One of them nearly drowned—it took two days to nurse it back. (*Smiles*) That would have been your job if you'd been there.

ANGELA (*blinks*) : Would it ?

DICK (*jumping up*) : And then—the spring sowing ! God, what wouldn't I give to sow the Ten Acre field again ! Or the Red Field in the Valley ! To sow any field anywhere——

ANGELA : Oh, darling, so you shall. You must. One day you'll sow as many fields as you like.

DICK : Angela, it's the life ! There's no life like it ! You'd love it—the fresh air—the sunshine—the wind and the rain—the honest-to-God work to be done wherever you turn—all day and every day ! You'd love every minute of it.

ANGELA : Would I ?

DICK : Don't you feel yourself that you would ?

ANGELA : Well, I haven't thought a lot about it, darling. At least, only vaguely—you've always spoken about it before as something we'd do in years to come—when you'd saved up enough. And I honestly don't think I'd be terribly good at things like—well, nursing muddy lambs in the dawn.

DICK (*laughs*) : Yes, you would ; you'd be marvellous at it.

ANGELA : But seriously, Dick, you will think it over carefully, won't you ? I mean about forming a company to make the motor yourself. It would be so terrible to fail, after all those months working on it.

DICK (*at window*) : Fail ? I won't fail. In two years from now I'll be free.

ANGELA : Well, I still think, darling, before you take the risk, you ought to see what the International——

DICK : You keep harping on the *risk*. I tell you we'll never get anywhere in life if we don't take *some* risk. I know my motor will succeed—Alec agrees with me—it's bound to. What about *his* risk ?

ANGELA : Who's risk ?

DICK : Alec's.

ANGELA : What's Alec got to do with it ?

DICK : Well, he's helping to raise the capital, and he's going to put five hundred of his own into it.

ANGELA : *Alec is ?*

DICK : Yes ; he thinks he can raise three thousand.

ANGELA : Oh ! So that's why you've gone back to the idea—Alec has talked you into it ?

[*A ring at door. ANGELA opens it. GWEN CLAYTON is there : a woman of twenty-eight, with good features, full curving lips, and a well-developed figure. She carries herself with exuberant self-confidence, and there are fires of passion in her dark, smiling eyes.*

Hello, you ! I thought you were going to ring me up again ?

GWEN : I know ; I didn't get away in time. Hello, Dick.—Joe is taking me to feed up West, so I told him to pick me up here from the office. I came along to tell you about Mr. Grey at the I.E.C.

ANGELA (*with a glance at DICK*) : Oh, yes. I've just been telling Dick. Did you see him ?

GWEN : Yes ; he was terribly nice, and frightfully interested, and—(*to DICK*)—he said he'd be delighted to see you to-morrow at three o'clock.

ANGELA (*after a quick glance at DICK*) : You are a dear, Gwen ; thanks most awfully. Isn't it sweet of her, Dick ?

DICK : Er, yes. Thanks, Gwen, for taking the trouble——

GWEN : Oh, it wasn't any trouble ; I enjoyed it. (*To ANGELA*) It was quite thrilling to be in the chief's room again, seeing everyone dashing about trying to look busy.

ANGELA : Did it make you wish you were back ?

GWEN (*smiles*) : No, thank you ; it wasn't quite so thrilling as that. The thrilling part was seeing what I had escaped from. Give me a home and freedom any day before an office.

[DICK smiles his approval and looks at ANGELA to see how she takes that.]

But I liked meeting old friends again.

DICK : We had a mutual friend here just now—Alec.

GWEN (*starts*) : Who ? Alec ? Alec Winstone ?

DICK : Yes, we ran into each other to-day. He enquired after you and Joe, and the kids.

GWEN (*quickly recovers herself*) : Really ; how nice of him. Such an age since I saw Alec.

ANGELA (*offering cigarette-box to GWEN*) : How are the brats ?

GWEN : Splendid. Teddy is frightfully thrilled about the new all-electric house. We move in the week after next.

DICK : When did Joe give up his idea of moving to town ?

GWEN (*smiles*) : The day I saw the all-electric house.

DICK : Oh—you decided ?

GWEN : Naturally. I may be old-fashioned enough to believe that woman's place is in the home, but I'm modern enough to think that a woman has a right to *choose* the home, since she has to run it and live in it most.

[ANGELA smiles and looks at DICK to see how he takes that.]

DICK (*to ANGELA, going up*) : Send Alec in when he comes. I said I'd have some rough figures ready for him.

ANGELA : O.K.

[DICK goes out via corridor.]

GWEN (*lowers her voice*) : He gave me quite a shock when he said Alec was here. Isn't it rather dangerous ?

ANGELA (*also low*) : Why dangerous ? Alec means nothing to me to-day.

GWEN : I know, my dear, but—oh, well, so long as Dick doesn't find out.

ANGELA (*snappily*) : How on earth could he ?

GWEN : Well—you know how things happen. If you and Alec let something slip when you're talking, for instance——

ANGELA : What do you take us for, a couple of damn fools ?

GWEN (*shrugs*) : Sorry.

ANGELA : Anyway, Dick always knew there was someone else. We told each other everything before we were married—naturally we didn't mention names. (*Is silent, thinking.*)

GWEN : All the same, you don't look too happy about it.

ANGELA : I wish you and Joe were staying to supper now. There isn't enough for five . . .

GWEN : That's what I call a nice pressing invitation.

ANGELA (*Goes up and glances along corridor, then comes back quickly*) : Gwen, I want you to do something for me. Alec's coming is dangerous in another sense. Dick has gone back to the idea of making the motor himself, and he's talking of going into partnership with Alec. Alec says he can raise capital. Will you be an angel, Gwen, and come back afterwards ?

GWEN : Of course, my dear ; but I don't quite see——

ANGELA : I don't want to give Alec the chance of talking Dick into this before he's seen Mr. Grey to-morrow. They're planning to spend the evening together discussing it ; but if we're all here they can't.

GWEN : Is it altogether wise, Angela, to interfere ? I mean, if Dick really wants to form a company——

ANGELA : He doesn't—not really. We discussed it several times, and he agrees with me it would be much safer not to. But I know what Alec is : glib as they make 'em. And I know what Dick is once he gets set on anything. (*Hesitates : then with an air of one making a disclosure*) He wants me to chuck my job—and have a baby.

GWEN : Yes, why don't you, Angela ?

ANGELA : You knew !

GWEN : Well—I guessed. It's only natural.

ANGELA : My God, you suburban wives don't miss much, do you ?

GWEN : Garden City wives, please.

ANGELA : How *could* you guess ?

GWEN : You'll be able to guess more than that about husbands when you've been married six years. You won't have to *guess* it either. But seriously, why don't you, Angela ? Don't you want a child ? You *know* you do.

ANGELA (*hesitates*) : Quite. I'm not all of a twitter for one. I know I could get quite a kick out of a baby—Dick's baby—but not if it means stinting and scraping to make both ends meet. (*Significantly*) Not if Dick is going to throw away his chance of selling the motor. I think I'll keep my freedom a little longer.

GWEN (*leans back luxuriantly, stretching out her arms*) : Oh, well, we can't have it both ways, I suppose. You want *your* freedom *first*—I've got mine *now*. At least I'm going to have it soon—I think.

ANGELA : What do you mean ?

GWEN : What I say. I've *had* my babies. I've spent six good years dragging them up, and

now I think I'm entitled to a little freedom.
(*Smiles rather mysteriously.*)

ANGELA (*looks at her more closely*) : You're different to-night, Gwen. I thought there was something about you when you came in. You seem rather pleased with yourself.

GWEN : Do I ?

ANGELA : What's happened ?

GWEN : Nothing—yet.

ANGELA : What are you being so sinister about ?

GWEN (*laughs*) : Well, if you want to know, I met someone at the office—someone who used to be rather keen on me. I feel rather thrilled.

ANGELA : You look it.

GWEN : My God, do I ? (*Opens her bag and examines herself in mirror.*) Anyway, I don't suppose Joe would notice.

ANGELA : What *are* you dithering about ?

GWEN : He asked me to supper. At his flat.

ANGELA : Alone ?

GWEN : I suppose so. I'm not going, of course.

ANGELA : I should think not—minx.

GWEN : I may go to tea, perhaps.

ANGELA : At his flat ?

GWEN : Why not ? What harm is there in going to tea with a man ?

ANGELA : But—this is new for you, Gwen. I mean—I always thought you and Joe were such—well——

GWEN : I know, you needn't say it. "Such good friends." Joe is "such a good husband," and I'm "such a good wife and mother." Well, so we are. What of it ? Why should that prevent

either of us from enjoying the company of the opposite sex ?

ANGELA : But you say Joe is so good to you.

GWEN : Oh, terribly "good," my dear.

ANGELA : Then—*why* ?

GWEN (*jumping up restlessly*) : Because he's so damned dull. Because we're both so damned dull—to each other. Because the gilt is off the gingerbread : both sides. So now you know. That's what six years of marriage can do, with or without babies.

ANGELA : Gwen, you amaze me ! I always thought you and Joe got on so well together. Joe is such a dear——

GWEN : *Of course* we get on well together. *Of course* Joe is a dear. (*Stretching out her arms in a slow, voluptuous movement that emphasises her animality*) That's just it. Six years ago Joe was a darling—a romantic, passionate lover. To-day he's just a dear—an unromantic, unpassionate husband. (*She drops her arms, with a challenging smile.*) So what ? (*A ring at door.*) Here he is, I expect.

[ANGELA goes. LUCY is there.]

LUCY (*out of breath*) : I just wanted to tell you—I think it's all right. Father wants you to stay now. Mother is arguing with him downstairs.

ANGELA : I'm afraid your mother won't agree, Lucy——

LUCY : Oh, she will—she'll have to. Father always wins.

[JOE CLAYTON appears behind her in the lobby.]

JOE : Hello, hello, hello. May I come in ?

[*He does so. He is a thin, tallish man of thirty-six, rather colourless and neutral. He carries an attaché-case, newspaper and brollie, and is dressed in conventional City clothes. As he squeezes past LUCY in the doorway he looks her up and down with interest.*]

ANGELA : Hello, Joe. (*To LUCY, who is withdrawing*) We'll talk about it later—thanks for being such a dear. (*LUCY goes.*)

JOE : Well, Angela.

ANGELA : Well, Joe. Come to collect your baggage ?

JOE (*slow in the uptake*) : Eh ? Oh, yes. Ready, dear ?

GWEN : Quite. (*Holds up cheek to be kissed at the same time saying to ANGELA*) Who's the wench ?

ANGELA : Landlord's daughter. She's sweet. We've just had a row with the old couple : they discovered that Dick and I were living in sin before we came here and they wanted to chuck us out.

JOE : I say !

ANGELA : But Lucy is on *our* side ; she wants us to stay. By the way, she's looking for a job, Joe. No hope in your Department, I suppose ?

JOE : Afraid not—without passing the Civil Service exam.

ANGELA : I'd like to help the kid ; she's just finished her training and she's got excellent certificates, but she can't get a job for love or money.

GWEN : She hasn't too much chance of getting one for love.

ANGELA : Don't be such a cat.

JOE (*to GWEN*) : Why not ?

GWEN : It's not at certificates that a man looks when he is engaging a girl.

JOE (*slow again*) : Oh ? At what, then ?

GWEN : Her sex-appeal, dear.

JOE (*with his mild laugh*) : Ha—quite. Although personally I thought she seemed quite an attractive youngster from the glimpse I caught of her.

GWEN : Yes, I saw you catching a glimpse of her.

ANGELA : And Dick says she has charm.

GWEN (*collecting her bag, etc.*) : Oh, *does* he ? That's dangerous, my dear. No wonder she wants you to stay.

ANGELA : Rats.

GWEN : When a man says a woman has charm I always suspect——

ANGELA (*laughs*) : Woman ! The child is barely eighteen, if that.

GWEN : Well ? Were you so very harmless at eighteen ? Is any girl nowadays ?

ANGELA : Oh, don't be an ass, Gwen. (*She turns away, but GWEN's banter has registered faintly with her.*)

GWEN (*deliberately teasing her*) : Well, she certainly seemed pretty keen just now that you shouldn't be chucked out. (*Winks at JOE.*)

ANGELA (*turns back, slightly angry*) : What are you hinting at, Gwen ? (*JOE looks from one to the other in mild surprise.*) Are you seriously suggesting—— ?

GWEN (*laughs*) : My dear, it's you that's being serious. I'm only reminding you that kids of eighteen are rather impressionable—especially where married men are concerned. It makes it more exciting and romantic. (*To JOE*) Come along, dear, we're in the way ; they're expecting someone to supper—you remember Alec Winstone ?

JOE : Yes, rather ! Haven't seen him for months.

ANGELA : Come back and have a cup o' coffee with us and meet Alec.

GWEN : We'd love to ! (*To JOE*) Wouldn't we, dear ?

JOE (*looks at his watch*) : Well—er——

[DICK *enters with a "Hello, Joe."*

Ha—the villain enters.

DICK : I hear you've taken an all-electric house, instead of coming to town. I wondered if you could get me some particulars—I expect Angela has been telling you : we're thinking of moving too.

GWEN : Angela ! You little wretch, you never even mentioned it !

ANGELA : Well, we only thought of it ourselves ten minutes ago——

GWEN : My dear, you'd adore an electric house ! Electric heating in every room, electric cooking and refrigerators——

JOE : Now she's off.

GWEN : Yes, I mustn't start. (*Collecting JOE*) Come along, dear ; we'll tell them all about it when we come back. So long, kids. See you later.

[*She sweeps JOE out with her. DICK turns to ANGELA in surprise.*

ANGELA : They're coming back to see Alec.

DICK (*frowns*) : I wish you hadn't done that. I want to talk business with Alec. I'll take him along to my den ; you can entertain them.

ANGELA : Darling, you can't treat them like that. After all, they're Alec's friends too and they'll probably have heaps to talk about. You know what Gwen is when she starts.

DICK : But I must get some time with Alec. I wish you wouldn't spring these invitations without warning me.

ANGELA : I might say the same about you inviting Alec to supper !

DICK : Switch Gwen on to talking about the new house ; she's keen to tell you all about it.

ANGELA : I'm not sure that I want to hear all about it.

DICK : Oh ? Why not ?

ANGELA : Until we know what's going to happen about the motor.

DICK : But I *do* know, Angela. I know I'll *succeed*. I'm certain——

ANGELA : Oh, for goodness' sake have sense, darling ; how *can* you be certain ? It's so stupid to talk like that.

DICK : If you had a little more confidence in me perhaps——

ANGELA : It isn't a question of having confidence in *you*. I have no confidence in Alec. You're not taking him *seriously*, Dick—about raising the money, I mean ?

DICK : Why not ?

ANGELA : Because it's absurd ; it's only his talk. I've known Alec longer than you have : he always talks big like that.

DICK : But—why ?

ANGELA (*shrugs*) : To impress people, I suppose. Swank. You'd be awfully foolish to count on him. Besides, what does he know about electricity ? Nothing !

DICK : That's not the point——

ANGELA : He's only out for what he can make out of you.

DICK : That's hardly the point either. If he raises the money——

ANGELA : That *is* the point ! I tell you you'll be a fool if you have anything to do with him !

DICK : But—what's all the excitement about ? Why this sudden antipathy to Alec ? I always thought you quite liked him ?

ANGELA : I do quite like him, but I don't like the idea of him making money out of *you*.

DICK : Why not, if he helps me to make money too ?

ANGELA (*hesitates, then pleading*) : Dick, don't do this. Don't get mixed up with Alec. It's not wise—I know it isn't—I *feel* it isn't.

DICK (*shakes his head*) : Sorry. I can't let myself be guided by vague feelings. I've made up my mind. I must get on with those figures.

[*As he passes her he pauses to stroke her hair lightly and say :*

Now don't worry your head about this. Take my advice——

ANGELA (*snaps*) : I won't take your advice !

DICK : Angela—seriously—don't you think I'm capable of judging—— ?

ANGELA : I told you what I think. I think you're a *fool* to let Alec trick you into this.

DICK (*laughs*) : Trick ? My dear girl——

ANGELA : Yes, *trick*. And you needn't talk to me like a child !

DICK (*shrugs*) : Very well. It will help if you try not to behave like one. It's absurd to go on like this. I know what I'm doing. I've talked it over with Alec——

ANGELA : Yes, I know you have, without saying a *word* to *me*. That's how you're always treating me lately—you never tell me anything—— (*The injustice of it sweeps over her suddenly, bringing a hint of tears to her voice.*) You don't trust me——

DICK : Oh, that's just nonsense.

ANGELA (*her lips trembling*) : You know you don't.

DICK (*shrugs again*) : Very well. (*Turns to go out.*)

ANGELA (*in tears*) : And I think you're a beast to

treat me like this and not let me discuss things with you !

DICK (*turns back*) : Angela—darling——

ANGELA (*sobbing*) : You used to be different ! You used to let me talk to you about your work and everything ! You're changing !

DICK : Angela, darling, I'm not ! (*Takes her in his arms.*)

ANGELA : You are ! You used to be different ! You used to say we'd always trust each other and share everything together—and now you're starting to shut me out of everything——

DICK : I'm not, darling, I tell you I'm not !

ANGELA : You *are*, Dick, you *are* ! (*Sobs on his shoulder.*)

[*He tries to console her, and presently succeeds a little.*]

DICK : You mustn't imagine things like that, darling.

ANGELA (*drying her eyes*) : It's true, Dick. You don't seem to want me to take an interest in your work any more.

DICK : Of course I like you to take an interest, but—you can hardly expect me to consult you on every step I take.

ANGELA : I think you ought to tell me the important ones, the ones that affect our future.

DICK : Well, so I do.

ANGELA : Yes, you tell me afterwards : like this scheme with Alec.

DICK : Well, suppose I *had* told you about this first, and suppose *you* had disagreed. What then ?

ANGELA : We could have talked it over together.

DICK : But suppose we *had* talked it over and you still disagreed ?

ANGELA : What's the good of supposing ? I don't see——

DICK : Ah, I'm afraid you're hedging.

ANGELA : I'm not hedging !

DICK : Now steady, darling. Let's keep our heads about this. It's important.

ANGELA (*moves away*) : Well, you're only trying to put me in the wrong.

DICK (*controlling his impatience*) : I'm trying to make you realise once and for all that discussion must stop somewhere. Talking things over is all very well, but when it's a question of—of judgment—of weighing the pros and cons of a business problem——

ANGELA : A woman's intuition is often right about business problems.

DICK : Possibly. A woman's intuition can also be hopelessly wrong——

ANGELA : So can a man's judgment.

DICK (*losing patience*) : Very well then. That settles it. It's your intuition against my judgment. I've got to choose between them. I choose to act by my own judgment. That's final. There's nothing more to be said.

[*He turns on his heel and goes to corridor.*]

ANGELA : There is something more to be said ! (*He ignores her.*) Dick ! (*He halts in archway and looks back at her.*) I want to tell you something.

DICK : Well ?

ANGELA (*quite calm now*) : You remember, before we were married, when we exchanged confidences and I told you about my—*affaire* ?

DICK : Yes.

ANGELA : It was with Alec.

[*DICK comes down a few paces.*]

Neither of us mentioned names at the time, you remember : we agreed not to tell.

DICK : Why are you telling me now ?

ANGELA : I think it's only fair.

DICK : To whom ?

ANGELA : To you.

DICK : Why ?

ANGELA : Well, if you're going into business with Alec—and happened to find out later from anyone else—you'd blame me for not telling you, wouldn't you ?

[DICK comes back into the room thoughtfully, trying to fit his philosophy of "sex equality" to this new situation.]

DICK (*presently*) : Very well. You've told me. Thanks.

[With a casual air he picks up a newspaper from the settee and pretends to scan it. ANGELA goes to kitchen, stealing a backward glance at him as she goes out. She returns presently to table.]

ANGELA (*in a friendly, innocent tone*) : What will you do, Dick ?

DICK (*in affected surprise*) : Do ? What do you mean ?

ANGELA : I was right to tell you, wasn't I ?

DICK (*sits down, still pretending to scan the paper casually*) : I suppose I'd prefer not to have known, but in the circumstances perhaps you were right.

ANGELA : Then it won't make any difference ?

DICK : I don't see why it should upset a purely business arrangement. It's a thing of the past—I presume. (*Glances up at her.*)

ANGELA : Darling, of course it is ! Alec isn't worth your little finger. (*Busying herself at the*

table) It's certainly over as far as *I* am concerned.

DICK (*arrested*) : What does that mean ?

ANGELA (*looks round innocently*) : What does what mean ?

DICK : Are you suggesting it's not over as far as Alec is concerned ?

ANGELA (*smiles*) : Darling, how can I know what Alec feels about me to-day ? He was terribly fed up with me for leaving him—but he may have got over it by now. He'd better. I can easily make that *quite* clear to him this evening.

DICK : I'd rather you didn't. I don't think Alec is the kind of chap to play that game. We've just been telling the people downstairs that we have our own ideals of love and marriage : this is one of the cases where we can apply them. It's up to both of us to forget the whole thing and treat Alec as if it had never happened.

ANGELA : You mean, you'd like me to behave just naturally to him this evening—as if I'd never been his mistress ?

DICK (*winces at the word*) : Yes.

ANGELA (*busies herself tidying the room*) : Very well, darling : perhaps that *would* be best—if you're sure it's not going to make any difference.

DICK : I've already told you, I see no reason why it should affect a purely business arrangement.

ANGELA : I meant—a difference to your friendship.

DICK : Nor to our friendship. Alec need never know you told me.

ANGELA : But *you* will always know. (DICK is silent.) Especially if we're going to see a lot of him from now on, as I suppose we will.

DICK : What's that got to do with it? Why should that affect our friendship?

ANGELA (*vaguely*) : I just wondered.

DICK : Wondered *what*?

ANGELA : Well—you seeing him nearly every day perhaps—and always knowing that he had me first.

DICK (*winces again*) : Must you be so damn crude about it?

ANGELA : Well, loved me first—slept with me first.

DICK (*mutters into paper*) : Oh, shut up!

[ANGELA gives a last unnecessary touch to a cushion and goes to the bedroom. The paper drops from DICK's hands. He is staring into space—when a ring at the door brings him back to reality. He opens the door, to admit ALEC.]

ALEC (*cheerily*) : Well—that's that. Just caught the old bird leaving his office. (*Turns his thumbs up.*) I think. Anyway, he's interested—definitely. Wants to see figures. I told him I'd bring you along to-morrow at twelve.

DICK (*nods*) : I've been getting out some rough figures.

ALEC : No good, old man. He'll want accurate figures. Marks will want to see the thing worked out in shillings and pence almost.

DICK (*reflects*) : That's going to take time, and most of my catalogues and lists—giving prices of materials—are over at the workshop. (*Offers cigarette-box as he speaks.*)

ALEC : Thanks.—Well, what's wrong with going over there? I'm all for a spot of work.

DICK : I'm afraid I can't do that. We've got some friends coming in this evening—Joe and Gwen Clayton—we told them you'd be here.

ALEC : Oh. You must see them, I suppose?

DICK : They're coming to see *you*.

ALEC : Me ? Well, that's very nice of them, but can't we postpone the pleasure ? I mean, business is business, old man, and we can't afford to miss a chance like this. Old Marks is definitely expecting us to-morrow !

DICK (*hesitates, glancing at bedroom door*) : Right. We'll go over directly after supper.

ALEC : That's the spirit ! " Strike while the iron's hot's " my motto.

[ANGELA enters from bedroom, looking very attractive in her new semi-evening frock. Both men look at her, ALEC with frank appreciation, DICK with a certain amount of surprise.]

ANGELA : Hello, Alec. (*Crossing to kitchen*) Supper won't be long now.

ALEC : The new frock, eh ?

ANGELA : Yes—I thought I'd try it out this evening. Like it ?

[Exit ANGELA.]

ALEC : Rather ! (*To DICK*) Suits her, doesn't it ?

[DICK has struck a match and is holding it up for ALEC to light his cigarette ; but ALEC ignores it—his eyes are following ANGELA to the kitchen.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE : *The same.*

TIME : *About an hour later.*

ANGELA, DICK and ALEC are seated at the table.
Supper is over and ANGELA is pouring out coffee.

ALEC : Yes, it's going to transform the countryside all right. Ultimately, I suppose, you'd like to see electricity in every village and every farm ?

DICK (*nods*) : In every hamlet and every farm labourer's cottage.

ANGELA : You don't want much, darling.

ALEC : You honestly think the average farm labourer would work better if he had electricity in his cottage ?

DICK : There's no need for him to work better. He'd *live* better : he'd have a standard of living nearer to the city worker's. Why shouldn't he enjoy the advantages of science as well as the city worker ?

ANGELA : Let me see, black for you, Alec ?

ALEC : Yes, please.

ANGELA : —and one big lump and one small.

ALEC : Er—yes—thanks. Good guess.

[ANGELA gives a little laugh. ALEC frowns at her covertly. DICK pretends not to notice.]

(Turning to DICK again) Oh, I agree, I'm all in favour, if it's practicable.

DICK : It will have to be *made* practicable, unless the cities are to go on attracting workers from the land indefinitely.

ANGELA : All the same, I do think it will spoil things in a way. When you think of some of those sweet little cottages in the country, with their thatched roofs and roses climbing all over

them—they'll never be quite the same again when they're modernised and electrified.

DICK (*with feeling*) : You've never *lived* in one of those sweet little cottages in autumn or winter—when the country is sopping wet or freezing cold and it's pitch dark at four in the afternoon. You've only seen them from the outside on a bright summer's day.

ANGELA (*mildly reproving*) : Well, I only said they won't be quite the same when they're electrified. And it so happens that I *have* seen them in the winter—when I've been away for week-ends.

[*She does not appear to stress this last remark, but it produces a momentary silence and makes ALEC shuffle again uneasily.*]

ALEC : Personally I wasn't thinking of cottages so much as—well, the countryside generally. I reckon it will spoil the picture a bit when those steel towers that carry the current—pylons, you call 'em?—are dotted all over the country.

ANGELA : Ghastly things.

DICK (*rather curtly, to ALEC*) : Why should they spoil the picture? Country folk don't mind them.

ALEC : Well, they're not exactly what you'd call artistic.

DICK : They're not meant to be, any more than a plough is—or a threshing-machine—or the millions of telegraph-poles or railway-lines around the country.

ALEC : Yes, I see the point. Funny how we town people—(*includes ANGELA with a gesture*)—seem to have a different angle on the country from you.

DICK : You see the country as a picture post-card. You're only interested in the surface effects—the leaves and the blossoms. You know nothing about—the roots. (*There is an involuntary tinge of contempt in his voice.*)

ANGELA : More coffee, Alec ?

ALEC : No, thanks.

[DICK *looks at his watch*.

ANGELA : I wish you wouldn't keep looking at the time, darling. They'll be here soon now.

DICK : Can't wait : we have five or six hours' work before us.

ANGELA : Oh, darling, it won't look very polite if you're working when they arrive.

DICK : We're not working here. Most of my books are at the shop. We're going over there.

ANGELA (*puts down her cup*) : What ? Don't be funny, darling.

DICK (*rising*) : There's no alternative.

ANGELA : Dick, you *know* you can't do a thing like that. *Whatever* would they think ? They're coming especially to meet Alec.

DICK : They can meet him to-morrow or some other day.

ANGELA : But you can do your work to-morrow—there isn't all *that* hurry about it.

DICK (*shakes his head*) : Sorry. (*To ALEC*) Ready ?

ANGELA : Alec, you wouldn't treat Joe and Gwen like that ?

ALEC : Business is business, Angela. You see, I've just been to call on a chap who may put up a thousand for the motor. We're meeting him to-morrow, and he——

ANGELA : To-morrow ?

ALEC : Yes ; he wants to see some figures first——

ANGELA : But surely you can put him off ! What time to-morrow ? Dick has an important appointment at three.

ALEC : That won't interfere : ours is for twelve

o'clock. (*To DICK*) And if we can put the proposition to him fair and square, while he's in the mood, we may get his promise for the thousand before we leave his office.

DICK (*nods*) : I'll collect my rough figures to take with us. (*Turns to corridor.*)

ANGELA (*jumping up*) : But, darling, listen ! Apart altogether from Joe and Gwen—there's no point in your meeting this man until you've seen Mr. Grey to-morrow——

DICK (*sharply*) : I've told you I'm not going near Mr. Grey to-morrow or any other day. Is that clear ?

ANGELA (*in her injured voice*) : What an extraordinary mood you're in this evening !

DICK : I wouldn't call your own mood quite ordinary.

ALEC (*pacifically*) : We can't risk falling down on this, Angela. If Dick's stuff is at the shop we've just got to go there ; that's all there is to it, I'm afraid.

ANGELA : But—why *must* you ? There's no need for you *both* to go. (*To DICK, brightly*) That solves it, darling. If Alec stays here while you go for the books, he can talk to Joe and Gwen when they arrive and be ready to start work with you the minute you come back. (*She turns to ALEC, who looks questioningly at DICK. She turns back to DICK.*) That will kill two birds with one stone, darling, without wasting time. (*Turns to ALEC again.*) Don't you agree, Alec ?

ALEC : It's O.K. with me, if—— (*Looks at DICK.*)

ANGELA (*to DICK*) : And then you can settle down to an evening's work together in comfort, instead of in that stuffy little workshop. Yes, that's it. Take a taxi, darling : be extravagant for once. You'll be back here in twenty minutes.

DICK : Thanks ; but I'm not coming back.

ANGELA (*frowns*) : You mean—— ?

DICK : I mean we're both going to the workshop.

ANGELA : But *why* ? If——

DICK : Because I say so !

ANGELA : But you have no right to " say so " ! You're not the only one concerned ! There's Alec to be considered, and me, and Joe and Gwen. It's sheer selfishness to want to upset all our arrangements. There's no necessity for you both to go——

DICK : There's every necessity. (*He hesitates a second.*) I want Alec to see the motor running on the bench.

ANGELA : Oh ? That's new. Must you show him to-night ? I thought you were going to be terribly busy on figures——

DICK : I can't help what you thought !

ANGELA : There's no need to be rude about it.

DICK : Then keep out and don't interfere !

ANGELA (*flaring*) : Don't be so damned insulting ! What do you think I am ? Your servant ?

DICK (*to ALEC*) : I'll collect my rough sheets.

[*He goes out via corridor. ANGELA sits at table again, angry.*]

ALEC (*soothingly*) : We'd better go, Angela ; we'll get more work done over there. And you can see he's all set : nothing will shift him now.

ANGELA (*icily*) : If you'd had the guts to back me up——

ALEC (*amused*) : Me ?

ANGELA : Instead of standing there like a dummy——

ALEC : It was hardly my place to butt in, I thought.

ANGELA : You've got damned correct all of a sudden.

ALEC (*smiles*) : Go on. It's like old times to hear you tick me off.

ANGELA (*in a different tone*) : We'd have had twenty minutes together——

ALEC : Perhaps I didn't want twenty minutes together.

ANGELA (*smiles*) : No ?

ALEC : Look here—what are you playing at ? You sailed pretty near the wind with some of the things you said this evening. You might have made him suspect about us.

ANGELA : Afraid ?

ALEC : I just don't understand. You told me once you were never going to let him know.

ANGELA : I don't *want* him to know.

ALEC : What do you mean ?

ANGELA (*leans forward, significantly*) : I mean that I don't want him to risk this motor business either.

ALEC : That's pretty obvious—but I don't see the point.

ANGELA : If he knew about us, that would finish it : he'd break with you. I've only got to tell him.

ALEC (*leans back and studies her*) : Yes, but you wouldn't be such a damn' fool.

ANGELA : Don't be so sure, Alec.

ALEC (*thinking he sees through her*) : Yes, I see ; that's why you've been hinting things at supper—thinking you were putting the wind up me, eh ? Oh, clever—damn clever—but not clever enough, my child. I'm with Dick in this, and if you'll take my advice you'll keep clear and let us get on with the job.

ANGELA : Alec, I'm serious : I *don't* want Dick to risk this. Neither does he really. Don't make him do it, please. If you dropped out—said you couldn't raise the money—he'd forget all about it and sell the motor like we'd arranged. Please, Alec ! (*Slides her bare arms along the table towards him, pleading urgently.*)

ALEC : Ha ! Wheedling now, eh ? You can't wheedle Dick but you think you can *me*. You used to be able to, I admit.

ANGELA : Alec, for *my* sake—for old times' sake—you loved me once—do this for me now. (*Leans closer to him.*)

ALEC (*with a note of triumph in his voice*) : Oh, no, not this time, Angela. Your time of wheedling me is over. You finished it yourself. Try your stuff on Dick. I reckon you've met your match in Dick.

ANGELA : It needn't be an end, Alec. We could go on seeing each other—all three of us. Please, Alec !

ALEC : Nothing doing, Angela.

ANGELA : Not even for my sake ? Not even after all we meant to each other—in the old days, Alec ?

ALEC (*mocking*) : Not even after all we meant to each other in the old days—before you got tired of me and walked out. (*Studies her for a moment.*) Not even though you're looking prettier and more attractive than I've ever seen you look before. Marriage has done you good, you know : filled you out, rounded you off, given you even more sex-appeal than you had—and God knows you were always pretty full of it. But get this clear, Angela. You're not going to make me mess up this scheme of Dick's, not if you try till you're blue in the face. You may bluff as much as you like about "telling" Dick—I'm

not falling for that ; you know too well on which side your own bread is buttered to make that mistake. So take my advice and be a good little girl and do what your husband tells you. (*He pats her arm playfully. She catches his hand, entwining her fingers in his.*) And sit up properly and stop this sex-appealing.

ANGELA : You're very sure of yourself, Alec.

ALEC (*trying to free his hand*) : Yes, I am—so don't start playing the fool.

ANGELA (*clinging*) : Alec, I'm serious. I mean what I say.

ALEC (*struggling*) : And *I* mean what *I* say. Do your own dirty work—I'm standing by Dick.

ANGELA : I'll tell him—I swear I will——

[*They are both standing now, struggling. ALEC suddenly turns his head and listens.*

ALEC : Look out ! He's coming !

ANGELA : Alec, promise ! Promise me !

ALEC : Let go, you little fool !

[*They struggle for a moment in silence. DICK enters.*

ANGELA flings herself away from ALEC as if she had just succeeded in breaking from his hold. DICK looks at them in angry amazement, but controls himself quickly and waits for one of them to speak. They are silent.

DICK : Hadn't one of you better explain ?

ALEC (*tries to pass it off with a smile*) : There's nothing to explain really. We were just—playing the fool.

[ANGELA is holding one of her wrists.

DICK : You were hurting her ?

ALEC : I'm sorry, Angela—I didn't realise I was being rough.

DICK : Why were you holding her ?

ALEC : Er—we were having a little trial of strength.

[ANGELA gives him a look of contempt.]

DICK (to ANGELA) : Is that your explanation ?

ANGELA (*with another look of contempt*) : I usually have trials of strength with your men friends, don't I ?

DICK : What's *your* explanation, then ?

ANGELA (*turns away with a shrug*) : I shouldn't have thought it needed much explaining. You'd better go to the shop and get on with your work—both of you.

DICK : Not before I know the meaning of this.

ANGELA : Please go, Dick. Both of you. I've changed my mind about Gwen—I'll explain to her you both had to go.

DICK : I want an answer to my question. Why did——

ANGELA (*in a pleading tone*) : I *can't* explain now, darling. I will some other time.

DICK : Then there *is* something to explain ?
(*Turns to ALEC.*)

ALEC (*after a moment's hesitation*) : Well—since Angela has taken this line—I admit there is. Apparently she's made up her mind to tell you—just as she's made up her mind to prevent us doing business together.

DICK (*looks at ANGELA suspiciously*) : She won't succeed.

ALEC : I'm not so sure. You may change your mind when she's told you. And in the circumstances I think she'd better tell you alone : you'll want some time to think it over. (*Moving to go*) You know my address ; if you'll drop me a line to-night——

DICK : Wait. I think we can settle this here——

ANGELA : No, he's right, darling. I'd rather tell you alone. You'll understand better.

DICK (*shrewdly*) : Perhaps I understand already. (To ALEC) Is it about your friendship with Angela in the past ?

ALEC (*surprised, and uncertain of what DICK means by "friendship"*) : Er—yes.

DICK : I know about that.

ANGELA (*quickly*) : It isn't only that, darling ; there's something else as well. Something Alec and I were talking about just now.

DICK : But why all these evasions ? Why can't I be told now ?

ANGELA (*shrugs*) : You needn't be told at all if you prefer. That would suit Alec perfectly.

ALEC (*to ANGELA*) : I don't know what you mean by that, but if you're trying to give Dick the impression that I——

ANGELA : I'm merely going by what you said just now, when you took my hand.

ALEC : When I—— ! You're not going to get away with that, Angela. I did *not* take your hand just now. You took mine.

ANGELA (*with contempt*) : You liar.

ALEC : You moved your hand across the table to me——

ANGELA : And you shrank away from it ? You didn't even touch it ?

ALEC : Well—I—yes, I admit I just patted it——

ANGELA (*laughs ; to DICK*) : He didn't take my hand, darling, he just patted it.

ALEC : And told you I'd have nothing to do with your plan to separate me from Dick.

ANGELA : And at the same time begged me not to tell him about us.

ALEC : That's not true. You twist things round so that——

DICK : If I may interrupt—I don't think bickering will help——

ALEC : Well, I want you to get this right, Dick, even if Angela thinks I'm a cad for blowing the gaff on her. She's just out to separate us : she doesn't want me to raise the money for your motor. In fact——

ANGELA : He knows that already. (*To DICK*) I told you quite frankly I thought it wasn't wise, darling, didn't I ?

ALEC : But you didn't tell him quite frankly, when he left the room just now, that you were going to try and vamp me into making you a promise——

ANGELA (*laughs*) : You didn't need much vamp-ing.

ALEC : But I didn't make any promise to you !

ANGELA : No, you were too busy making love to me. (*Turns away*) Hadn't you better go before I " twist things round " a little more ?

ALEC (*to DICK, suddenly*) : All right, I'll tell you then. Angela and I were lovers once ; she left me shortly after she met you. To-night—just now—she tried to trade on that to make me break with you—and because I wouldn't she's just wild. Now you know. As for making love to her—it's—it's——

DICK (*puzzled*) : But what's this " something else " that——

ANGELA : Just a moment, darling. He's forgotten to tell you *why* he doesn't want to break with you—or me. (*To ALEC*) I suppose you didn't tell me that marriage had made me more

attractive to you than ever ? That it had filled me out and rounded me off nicely and that I was looking prettier and more attractive to-night than you've ever seen me look before ?

ALEC (*to DICK with a smile*) : The evidence seems dead against me, I admit. I can see you're inclined to believe it ?

DICK (*curtly*) : I haven't heard you deny it.

ALEC : I deny that I—well, that I meant what she's suggesting ! I was just—fooling ; she knows it !

ANGELA : Were you fooling when you said I was full of sex-appeal to you ?

ALEC (*glares at her for a moment, then turns to DICK with a shrug*) : Oh, well, I reckon you'll take her word before mine——

ANGELA : Oh, no, you're not crawling out of it like that. It isn't a question of my word before yours. You haven't denied a thing I said—you daren't.

ALEC : And *you* daren't deny what *I* said ! In spite of all your sex-appeal you couldn't get me to break with Dick !

ANGELA : Quite. That's what made it so disgusting. You wanted to keep in with Dick, in the hope of making money out of his motor, while you "fooled" with me behind his back.

ALEC (*to DICK, with another helpless shrug*) : Nothing more to be said, I guess. (*He turns abruptly and gets his hat and coat. Then with affected jauntiness*) Your move next. If you want to get hold of me, you know where to find me. (*Goes.*)

[*A pause. DICK sits down thoughtfully.*]

ANGELA (*with a little sigh of relief*) : Well, you may disagree with me still, darling, but that's the very best thing that could have happened. Perhaps one day you'll realise——

[DICK is silent. She begins to clear away the supper things, glancing at him covertly, trying to divine his thoughts.

I know what you're thinking, darling, and I agree it was pretty beastly of me—I admit I led him on. I hated having to do it, but it was the only way I had of proving to you the kind of man he is. I decided at supper it was best for you to know.

DICK (*without looking at her*) : You've done a rotten thing.

ANGELA (*hurt and surprised*) : Darling, you'd rather learn it now than later on, wouldn't you ?

DICK : I've learned more about you than about Alec.

ANGELA : Then you mean I shouldn't have done it ? I should have let him make a fool of you ?

DICK : I'd rather *he* made a fool of me than you.

ANGELA : I ? *I* make a fool of you ?

DICK (*rises and goes up the room listlessly*) : Tell me the rest.

ANGELA : What rest ?

DICK : The “ something else ” that all the row was about.

ANGELA : But you've just heard, darling. I told you before he went. You heard him admit it.

DICK : Admit what ?

ANGELA (*hesitant*) : About finding me more attractive than ever, and—fooling with me behind your back. That was what maddened me.

DICK : That's the “ something else ” you wanted me to know ?

ANGELA : Of course. As I say, I did lead him on,

but only to prove to you—— (DICK's eyes are fixed on her.) Why are you looking at me like that? Don't you believe me?

[DICK turns away.

(Brightly) Oh, darling, do let's be sensible about it. I *know* it's all for the best; and you will too in time. You'll thank me for it one day.

DICK (turns back suddenly): I tell you this. You haven't altered my decision. You've succeeded in making things impossible between Alec and me, but—I'm going to manufacture the motor. I'll raise the money myself.

ANGELA (feeling that she can deal with this at her leisure): Very well, darling, if that's how you feel about it. I don't know why you've suddenly cut me out of your confidence and started deciding things alone. Of course, if you say so, we'll both just have to go our own ways, I suppose, in future, and make our own decisions about our own problems.

[As she speaks she takes a trayful of things to the kitchen. DICK, arrested by her last words, watches her go. She returns presently and continues clearing the table.

But it isn't what we promised each other when we were married. We said we'd always discuss things and decide things together, as equals. And we've always done so until to-day.

DICK: What did you mean just now, about deciding our own problems?

ANGELA: Well—that's what you want, isn't it?

DICK: What decision have *you* to make? What are you referring to?

ANGELA: Oh, nothing in particular. But naturally if I can't discuss things with you——

DICK: You mean the decision we made together this afternoon?

ANGELA : Well, naturally that's one. If I have a child I want to feel sure we'll have enough money to rear it properly.

DICK (*trying to keep calm, but inwardly fuming*) : " If " ? We've already *agreed* to have a child.

ANGELA : I agreed before I knew you decided not to sell the motor.

DICK (*flaring up*) : I see ! In other words, you're going to try and use this to make me give in to you about my own career ? That's it, is it ?

ANGELA (*slightly intimidated*) : Oh, Dick, you *must* see, you *must* understand how the two things affect each other——

DICK : You refuse to have a child because I won't give in to you !

ANGELA : Dick, *try* to see my side ! Try to understand——

DICK : All right ! I accept your challenge ! We'll see if I give in ! (*He turns and snatches his hat from the rack. Then with more restraint*) Now listen ! I'm going to the workshop. I'm going to start work on the new model, *now*. I'll finish it in a month—then we'll see who gives in. Don't wait up for me ; I won't be back to-night. I may not be back to-morrow——

ANGELA : Dick !

DICK : And when it's finished I'll raise the money myself——

ANGELA : Oh, Dick, be reasonable ! I only want you to see my point of view——

DICK (*with a harsh laugh*) : And if I don't you won't see mine !

ANGELA : But you don't even *try* to see mine——

DICK (*going*) : I've done all the trying I intend to do for the present.

ANGELA : You're afraid, that's why you're running away !

DICK (*in doorway*) : When I come back, if you still have the same point of view——

ANGELA : I won't be here when you come back ! I won't stay here alone ! Two can play at that game !

DICK (*trying to assume hard indifference*) : I see. Another challenge ? Very well, I accept that too——

ANGELA : You're afraid ! You're afraid to see my point of view.

DICK (*looks back at her with a puzzled superior air*) : Afraid ?

ANGELA (*tense and defiant now*) : Yes—afraid—you've always been afraid ! Ever since we were married !

DICK : Oh ?

ANGELA : You never tried to understand me. You never wanted to—you always ran away from the truth. You're running away now.

DICK (*hesitates, then comes back and throws his hat aside*) : Right. Let's hear the truth.

[*A pause. ANGELA's anger dies down. She sits at the table rather limply, facing him. When she speaks she is obviously trying to make amends. DICK also tries to be calm, but his male pride has been deeply hurt and his anger is still bubbling below the surface of his mind.*]

(*Pacing*) But before you begin you'd better be clear about one thing. This is your last chance. There's been too much of this lately—this eternal arguing about points of view. It's got to stop. Damn it all, if we're going to live our lives together we *must* have a common point of view !

ANGELA : Oh, Dick, don't let's begin by quarrelling. Let's be sensible about it——

DICK : All right, I just want you to know that. I can't stand this perpetual—*tension*—always pulling in opposite directions. It's holding me up. It's got to end. Go on. (*Sits.*)

ANGELA (*her chin in her hands*) : I want to ask you something, Dick. Do you think I'm terribly selfish in some things ? Truthfully ?

DICK : Since you ask, I'm afraid I do.

ANGELA : I don't blame you. I feel the same about you. Queer, isn't it ? I didn't before we were married.

DICK : I see. You wouldn't have married me if you had.

ANGELA : Oh, darling, don't let's be bitter about it. I'm not blaming you—we just didn't know each other as well as we thought we did, that's all. You're still the same man to me—deep down—the only man who ever really meant anything to me—you're worth fifty of Alec and all the other men I ever met in my life put together. Oh, I know I'm a little beast to you sometimes—I was just now—and I loathe myself when I am—I've got a devil in me—every woman has—I can't help myself sometimes. But I know I could be different—I could *help* you—if you'd only *let* me—if only you'd treat me like—well, like you promised to—as an equal. Sometimes I think of the talks we used to have, about equality, before we were married. Do you remember, darling ?

DICK : Some.

ANGELA : You used to say that men and women were going through a new stage in their relationship. Men were realising that women are intelligent beings, with special qualities and powers of their own to contribute to life. And

that the world was full of problems to-day and women could help to solve them as well as men. You still think that, darling, don't you ?

DICK : I still think that women could help to solve some problems if they wanted to.

ANGELA : Oh—you usen't to say " some." You always——

DICK : Well, I *meant* " some."

ANGELA : Then did you mean too that women are only equal to men in " some " things ?

DICK : Well, naturally women are only equal to men in some things. We're made differently—our minds and bodies—how *could* we be equal in everything ?

ANGELA : But I mean—taking everything into consideration—you still believe that women are equal to men ?

DICK : The trouble about this kind of talk is that we both probably mean different things. Everybody *talks* about sex equality to-day, but no one has ever defined it.

ANGELA : Well, let's define it now. What's your definition ?

DICK (*rises impatiently*) : Oh, Lord, let's keep to our own problems——

ANGELA : But, darling, this *is* our problem—don't you *see* ? For the future—we *must* know where we stand with each other.

DICK : Well, you know as well as I do that men and women have different needs—mentally and physically and every other way. And the problem between every pair of people is to—to—help fulfil each other's needs. (*Pacing again*) It's no good pretending to yourself that your needs are the same as mine—or mine the same as yours ; they're *not*. That's where most women go wrong to-day, trying to imagine they have

the same needs as men and forgetting their own real needs. Every man wants a woman to—anyhow, wants *his* woman to fulfil herself completely—

ANGELA (*smiles*) : “ His ” woman. Possessive case.

DICK : Well, his wife then ; what’s wrong with that ? And he expects her to have the same feeling for him. I need to go back to my own life as soon as I can—on the land, where I belong—and you do nothing but try to frustrate me.

ANGELA : Oh, I don’t, Dick ! I only—

DICK : Yes, yes, you do !

ANGELA : I *don’t* ! I only want you to be careful, not to take risks—

DICK : But I know I’ll win !

ANGELA : Yes, you *think* you know—

DICK (*suddenly mad*) : Damn you, have you no *faith* in me ! What the hell good are you to me if you can’t believe in me ?

[*Pause. They both cool down again.*]

ANGELA : And what about *my* needs ? They don’t count, I suppose ?

DICK : Have I ever opposed any real need of yours ?

ANGELA : Yes, you have, lots of times. Last week, for instance, when I wanted to buy a vacuum cleaner. Oh, I didn’t *need* it, of course—according to you. This is only a small flat with two carpets—so *you* decided it wasn’t necessary.

DICK : The people below haven’t a vacuum cleaner, and their flat is stiff with carpets and rugs.

ANGELA (*surprised at the reference*) : There are two women to clean the flat below, with all day to do it in.

DICK : Mrs. Webster only does the cooking. The kid does all the cleaning and housework.

ANGELA : Oh. Who told you ?

DICK : She did.

ANGELA : Who—Lucy ?

DICK : Yes.

ANGELA : When ?

DICK : The other morning. She was in the hall as I went out—dusting or something—and we had a few minutes' chat. I asked her about vacuum cleaners——

ANGELA (*bridling*) : You've been discussing me with *Lucy* ?

DICK : No, I just asked her if she had a vacuum cleaner—I may have said you were thinking of buying one or something like that——

ANGELA : Oh, so you *did* discuss me with her ?

DICK (*shrugs*) : If you call it discussing you to say——

ANGELA : I certainly do ! What else is it ?

DICK : I tell you we just happened to meet in the hall and I happened to mention the subject.

ANGELA : Quite. I seem to remember once or twice before that you “happened” to meet in the hall.

DICK : I often run into her in the hall in the mornings—in her little dusting apron.

ANGELA : How interesting. That's part of her “charm,” I suppose. Funny she's so seldom there when I go out.

DICK : Why funny ? I usually go out before you.

ANGELA : Exactly. I suppose you told her too that you don't want me to have a vacuum cleaner ?

DICK : Oh, shut up about the vacuum cleaner! You know the only reason I don't want you to have one is because I think it's a waste of money—especially as we pay a woman to come in and clean the place every morning.

ANGELA : *I* pay a woman.

DICK : Well, *you* pay a woman.

ANGELA : I also offered to pay half the vacuum cleaner out of my own money.

DICK : But don't you see that money wasted is money wasted, whichever does the wasting? And you know I want to *save* money—every penny I can.

ANGELA : Yet you want me to chuck my job—and have a baby.

DICK (*hesitates*) : There's nothing to be gained by confusing two quite separate issues.

ANGELA : But they're *not* separate issues—they're not to *me*. The money I earn keeps me in clothes and gives me pocket-money—even helps me with the housekeeping ; I buy heaps of little things you know nothing about. Yet you want me to chuck my job, to *waste* that much money, and at the same time take on all the expense of having a child. And on top of it all you want to risk not making a penny out of the motor. (DICK *is silent*.) Darling, don't you *see* how inconsistent it is—how *illogical* it is?

DICK : Put like that, perhaps. But it's all a question, as I said before, of what we *need*. To have a home, a *real* home, would mean more to me than the money you earn.

ANGELA : I see. And which of us “ needs ” the

baby? (*DICK registers anger at her apparent flippancy.*) I'm serious, darling. I want to know.

[*A ring at the door. DICK opens it. MR. WEBSTER is there.*]

WEBSTER : Good evening.

DICK : Good evening, Mr. Webster.

WEBSTER : I hope I'm not intruding, so soon again. But, if I might have a word with you, there's a suggestion I'd like to make—before you come to any decision about moving. (*DICK invites him in with a gesture. ANGELA rises, obviously annoyed by the interruption.*) Don't let me disturb you, Mrs. Shale ; 'twont take a minit.

ANGELA (*nose in air*) : Thank you, I have some wifely washing-up to do. (*Goes to kitchen, leaving door open.*)

WEBSTER (*ignoring the chair that DICK offers*) : It's about that workshop of yours. If you don't mind me asking you, you say it's too far away and that's one of the reasons you thought of moving from here?

DICK : Yes, it's one reason.

WEBSTER : Is it a big place?

DICK : Oh, no, just a small room—half the size of this.

WEBSTER : Then it can't have much in the way of what you'd call heavy machinery in it?

DICK (*smiles*) : It's not a *factory* workshop, you know. Just a couple of small lathes, a little furnace, some odds and ends, and about two tons of dirt.

WEBSTER : Aye. Well, here's my suggestion, for what it's worth. Mind you, if you're bent on leaving here, to better yourself, I'm not the one to try and hold you. But after the mistake we made to-day—if you're prepared to overlook

that—well, as I've told you before, I've always liked the cut of you and liked having you here, both of you, and—well, what I'm coming to is this : 'twas Lucy had the idea really ; she came out with it at supper when she heard me talking about you to her mother.

[ANGELA *appears in kitchen doorway, drying plate, listening.*

No doubt you've seen me from the window sometimes coming in and out of that hut at the end of the garden. It used to be a garage, but I don't run a car and I'm using it more as a lumber-room than anything else. Mind you, it's well built, and dry as a bone, with electric light laid on, and—well, if it's any good to you it's yours for the asking. (DICK *weighs the suggestion, obviously interested to some degree.*) You could always slip through our hall to the garden, without disturbing us. We'd be none the wiser whether you were out there or not : you could come and go just as you pleased.

DICK : It's very good of you to suggest it : I'd like to think it over.

WEBSTER : Well, there you are. You can transport the whole bag of tricks to-morrow if you like—dirt and all—and welcome. And if you don't want dirt—if you want the place kept tidy—I'm sure Lucy wouldn't mind slipping down the garden now and then to sweep round for you. (ANGELA *pauses in the drying of her plate.*) She's a rare one for keeping a place clean, and I know she'd like to, for she's no more anxious than I am to see new tenants here. And, as I say, 'twas her idea from the start.

DICK (*still weighing it*) : Well, it would certainly save time.

WEBSTER : Would you like to come down and look at the place ?

DICK : Yes, I should. (*To ANGELA*) You heard the suggestion ?

WEBSTER (*turning to ANGELA*) : Aye, what does Mrs. Shale think of it ?

ANGELA (*calmly, drying plate again*) : I think it's silly.

WEBSTER : Eh ? Silly ?

ANGELA : Yes, he'd never get away from it ; it would be much too near his home ; he'd be there every spare minute he had.

WEBSTER : An' that'd be silly ?

DICK : My wife is in a mood for thinking everything silly to-day.

ANGELA (*flushing*) : I think *you're* silly to jump at every idea that's put to you as if you hadn't a mind of your own.

DICK : But, damn it all, you know perfectly well——

WEBSTER : Please—please ! (*Waves a huge paw at him and looks from one to the other.*) Mebbe I've been hasty—interfering. I never thought Mrs. Shale would oppose anything that might help her husband.

ANGELA : It wouldn't help him. He'd overwork. He works much too hard as it is.

WEBSTER (*smiles*) : Ah, don't you believe it, Mrs. Shale. Take it from an old man that's had to work harder than most all his life, there's mighty few people in the world ever suffered hurt from working too much. Now may I tell you something else ?

ANGELA : If you want to.

WEBSTER : Well, it's this. When I first set eyes on your husband—on the pair of you—I said to meself : “ That young man's got something in

him ; he's got guts ; he'll go far—if his wife knows how to help him." Now I'll interfere no more. You know yourself, every bit as well as I do, what it means to your husband to feel that you're really behind him.

ANGELA : My place is not behind him, thank you.

WEBSTER : Not ? Where, then ?

ANGELA : Beside him. We believe in equality, you see.

WEBSTER : Aye, I see. And you're quite sure you're not a little in front of him—a bit in his light, mebbe ?

ANGELA : Oh, mind your own damn business !

DICK (*angrily*) : It's no good talking to her. I'm sorry, Mr. Webster. I'll come down and see the place.

WEBSTER (*firmly*) : Now mebbe you'd better think it over first. There's no hurry——

DICK (*looks at ANGELA*) : No, I'm coming *now*.

[*They go out. DICK leaves the door ajar. ANGELA takes another cigarette and smokes furiously. She drifts around the room restlessly for some moments. Presently she pauses at the mirror over the mantelpiece and surveys herself critically. LUCY appears in the doorway.*]

LUCY : May I come in ?

ANGELA (*sees her in mirror ; without turning*) : What do you want ?

LUCY (*surprised*) : Oh—just to talk. And to ask you something. You said I could come up.

ANGELA (*turns, forcing a smile*) : Of course. Do come in. Your father has just been telling us about your bright idea for the workshop. It was sweet of you to think of it. My husband has gone down to see it.

LUCY : Yes, do you think he'll take it ?

ANGELA : Well—that's rather doubtful ; we have so many other things to decide just at the moment. Have a cigarette. Oh, you don't smoke. Do sit down.

LUCY (*perching on the arm of a chair*) : I won't stay ; mother wants me. I did smoke the other day : my first.

ANGELA : Oh ?

LUCY : A boy friend made me try one, in the park.

ANGELA : How dreadfully wicked ! Did you like it ?

LUCY (*smiles*) : I hated it—and I felt pretty wobbly afterwards.

ANGELA (*chummily*) : What's the boy friend like ? Nice ?

LUCY (*shrugs*) : Nice to look at, but—oh, well—silly—like most boys to-day. He's only twenty-four.

ANGELA : Only ?

LUCY : Well, I do think *young* men are silly to-day. They're so conceited, and they never have anything to say—I mean anything interesting. All they think of is—oh, you know—trying to mess you about. And they think *you're* conceited if you don't let them.

ANGELA : What age do you like them, then ?

LUCY : Well, I don't really mind *how* old they are so long as—sounds dreadful, doesn't it ?—I mean, so long as they're sensible—and interesting—and *manly*. I suppose I got that from father partly ; he's always going on about men to-day : he says they have no backbone or ambition. I think he's right, don't you ?

ANGELA : Oh, I don't know. Some have.

LUCY : Jolly few. I know your husband has, of course—you're one of the lucky ones ! That's why father took such a liking to him from the start. That's why he was so upset when he heard—when he thought you weren't married. Of course, mother was *terribly* shocked.

ANGELA : Were *you* shocked ?

LUCY (*rather embarrassed by the question as well as by ANGELA's calm scrutiny*) : Not really. I—at least—well, I told you—I'm awfully muddled about lots of things to-day.

ANGELA : Such as ?

LUCY : Oh, everything really. I often read articles in the papers about religion—and sex—and free love—and sometimes I think they make everything sound perfectly foul. And then other times they seem fairly sensible. That's why I'm muddled about *you*. I used to think it was a pretty ghastly sin for a woman to—to give herself to a man without being married to him ; but I'm beginning to see now that—well, if she really loves him, I suppose, that's all that matters—in a sense.

ANGELA : I see.

LUCY (*rising suddenly*) : I must get back or mother will be after me. I couldn't talk like this downstairs—they'd be horrified !

ANGELA : Didn't you say you wanted to ask me something ?

LUCY : Oh, yes ! It was just now—I heard your husband telling father as they went out to the garden about starting some kind of company of his own. Is that true ?

ANGELA : We haven't decided yet. Why ?

LUCY : Well—I hope you won't think it's awful cheek on my part, but do you think there's any hope of him giving me a job ?

ANGELA : A job ? What sort of job ?

LUCY : Well—secretarial, I suppose. I'd adore to work for him. Will you put in a word for me ?

[DICK enters while she is speaking.

Oh ! Did you hear ?

DICK : What ?

LUCY : What I was saying ! (*Looks at ANGELA.*) Shall I dare ? (*To DICK*) I was asking her to put in a word for me when you start your new company, if there are any jobs going. I know it's awful cheek, but—do you think there's *any* hope ?

DICK : It's looking ahead rather. It may be two or three months before I get going properly. Then there *might* be a chance.

LUCY : Oh, hurray ! Thanks awfully.

DICK : But I can't promise anything——

LUCY : I don't care, I'll live in hopes. Thanks most awfully. Good-bye ! (*She runs out.*)

[*A pause. There is a definite tautening of the atmosphere between them ; each aware that a crisis is pending.*

DICK (*firmly*) : I've decided to try that place below. (*ANGELA is silent, smoking faster and faster.*) You still object ?

ANGELA : Why ask me, if you've decided ?

DICK : I want to know your real reason.

ANGELA : I told you. It's too near. You'll over-work.

DICK : And my present place is too far ?

ANGELA : It was you who said that first.

DICK : You objected to me staying there at night.

ANGELA : That's different. Would you object if *I* stayed away all night ?

DICK : What's that got to do with it ?

ANGELA : Well, *would* you ? If I went out now and stayed away to-night, would you object ?

DICK : Not if it was necessary.

ANGELA : Which of us would decide if it was necessary ? Suppose *I* thought it was necessary because I hated being alone, and you didn't ?

DICK : This is an example of "equality," I suppose.

ANGELA : Yes. It's an example of how *you* cross-examine *me*. You don't seem to like it.

DICK : So you expect me to have my workshop where you choose ?

ANGELA : I expect you to consider my wishes in the matter.

DICK : But there's to be no question of you considering *my* wishes in a much more important matter—the matter of having a child ?

ANGELA : You know that's different.

DICK : Oh, yes, everything is different that you don't agree with !

ANGELA : We agreed before we were married not to have children for two years.

DICK : And it rests with you whether we change our minds or not ?

ANGELA (*hesitates*) : Yes.

DICK : Indeed ? That's very "equal," isn't it ?

ANGELA : I'll have to bear them : that's not very "equal."

DICK : But of course I'll be allowed the privilege of supporting them, and you, all your lives ?

ANGELA : When I'm sure you'll be *able* to support them, and me, in a decent standard of life, I'll be willing to bear them.

DICK : And *you* must also decide the standard of life ?

ANGELA (*hesitates again*) : I've already agreed to have a baby if you'll promise not to take risks.

DICK : I see. In other words, unless I promise to be a good, obedient husband, and conduct my business and my life's work on lines that you approve, you refuse either to have a child or make a home for me ?

ANGELA : No decent man would want his wife to have a child against her will.

DICK : No decent wife would shirk having a child.

ANGELA (*stung*) : I don't shirk it ! You're a rotter to say that—just because I won't give in to you. (*Turns away.*) I don't shirk being a wife to you.

DICK : What do you mean by that ?

ANGELA : I don't deny myself to you.

DICK : Don't be a hypocrite. I hadn't noticed that you wanted to deny yourself to me.

ANGELA : You wouldn't.

DICK : What the hell do you mean ?

ANGELA : You take that for granted like everything else.

DICK : How very chaste we've become !

ANGELA : I could be chaster than you realise.

DICK : That's why you had an *affaire* with Alec, I suppose.

ANGELA : You swine, to bring that up ! (*Then, with a sudden smile of affected surprise, as if realising*

it for the first time) Oh, so that's it? That's why you've been so het up all the evening? Jealous. I begin to understand.

DICK : If I wasn't jealous it wouldn't be your fault. You've done a rotten thing to-night—and done it in a rotten way—the mean, contemptible way that only a woman could stoop to.

ANGELA : A woman's methods are always "mean and contemptible" when they beat a man's.

DICK (*snatches up his hat*) : That's settled, then. We go our own ways in future. You stick to your job : I stick to my decision—my "risk"—and it *will* be a risk now ! Every penny I've saved will be risked. So you'd better keep your job ; you may need it if I fail—as you're so certain I will ! (*Turns to go.*)

ANGELA (*torn between her pride and a longing to save the situation*) : I didn't say that. I didn't say I was certain——

DICK : You didn't need to. You showed it clearly enough.

ANGELA : I didn't ! It's not fair ! I only——

DICK : One day you'll know——

ANGELA : It's not fair to blame me for everything !

DICK : Have I ever been "fair" to you in anything ?

ANGELA : Oh, Dick—we're mad to talk like this ! Don't you *see*—we'll be sorry, both of us !

DICK : It's a bit late to think of that. I'm sorry already. I'm sorry I didn't see through you from the beginning. I'm sorry I ever believed your lying promises to help me.

[The bitterness and unfairness of that makes her flinch. She stares at him for a moment and her own bitter anger stirs again.]

ANGELA : I wasn't the only one to make promises. I never promised to be a *servant* to you. (*DICK pulls his hat on with an air of finality.*) And I won't be. I won't stay here. You'll see ! I'm through, too ! (*Her words and her intensity hold him*) That's all you want—a servant—someone to be at your beck and call—that's what you mean by equality ! Why do you want me to chuck my job ? Why do you want me to have a child ? Because I haven't kow-towed to you enough since we were married ! Because the few pounds I earn make me independent of you ! It isn't enough that I keep myself in dress and buy things for the flat, and cook your meals and wash up and keep the place decent, and stay in five evenings a week—when I used to go out nearly every evening of my life ! No ! You'd like to chain me down like a child, to be always at your beck and call, pandering to your male conceit and crawling to you for every penny I needed ! That's your dream of bliss ! You can wrap it up in a lot of sloppy talk about "motherhood" and "making a home," but that's your idea of equality—a little tin god and an adoring servant ! Well, it's not mine, and I'll damn well show you it's not !

[*She runs into the bedroom. DICK is too taken aback by her outburst to do anything but wait, vaguely apprehensive. She returns presently with her hat on, trailing a coat.*]

DICK (*stiffens*) : Where are you going ?

ANGELA (*pulling on her coat*) : You'll find the breakfast things on the second shelf in the cupboard if you want them.

[*She goes quickly to the door, but DICK reaches it just as she opens it. He jams his foot against it and gets in front of her.*]

DICK : Where are you going ?

ANGELA : I'm taking a night off.

DICK (*barring the way*) : Don't be a little fool.

ANGELA : Don't you be a fool. You know you can't stop me. If I don't go to-night I'll go to-morrow night—and the next. I won't come home from business. Perhaps when you've got your own meals and washed up for a few days it will bring you to your senses ! (*Tries to get past him.*)

DICK : You're not leaving here to-night. (*Forces her back.*)

ANGELA (*with a mocking laugh*) : Perhaps you think I mightn't be chaste ?

DICK : Go back, and don't be a silly little fool.

ANGELA : You're afraid I might have another *affaire* ? Perhaps you think I might go to Alec ?

DICK : I warn you not to use that weapon again !

ANGELA : I'll use what weapon I like ! You're having a taste of equality at last !

DICK : All right, by God ! We'll *have* equality—*complete* equality—we'll choose our own weapons ! (*Pushes her away roughly.*) Go back !

ANGELA : I won't !

DICK : Go back ! (*Smacks her across the face.*)

ANGELA : You swine ! I *will* go to Alec ! (*Tries to run past him.*)

DICK (*grabs her*) : You rotten little bitch !

ANGELA (*struggling*) : I *will* ! I'll go back to Alec !

DICK : Blast you ! (*Strikes her savagely.*)

ANGELA : You swine !

[*In a rage he clutches at her throat. She screams and sinks to her knees as his hands close on her. The door, which has been ajar since she opened it, is pushed wide open by GWEN and JOE.*]

JOE (*rushing forward*) : Good God ! Dick ! Dick !

[DICK comes to his senses and relaxes his grip.

GWEN : Angela—darling ! Angela ! (*Runs to her and takes her in her arms. ANGELA bursts into tears. To DICK flaming*) How could you ! You ought to be ashamed of yourself !

[*Sobbing hysterically, ANGELA goes to the bedroom, accompanied by the indignant GWEN. An awkward pause between DICK and JOE.*

JOE (*in an effort to be philosophical*) : Well, well. These things happen, I suppose—in every family. Sorry, old man.

DICK : We lost our heads.

JOE : I know. Awfully sorry. Cigarette ?

DICK : No, thanks.

[JOE lights a cigarette.

JOE : She'll be all right in a moment. Gwen will pull her round. (*In an effort to make conversation*) We've just been to Boredo's for supper. Jolly little place. Food good, too. Ever been ?

DICK : No.

JOE : Yes, we've been celebrating. The new house, you know : Gwen is very pleased about it. We thought, after all, it would be better for the kiddies to stay in Blissboro. Oh, and we were talking about what you said—about moving too. You've definitely decided ?

DICK (*hesitates*) : Not yet.

[*He goes to window and stares out. GWEN opens the bedroom door.*

GWEN : Joe, get me a glass of water for Angela, in the kitchen. She's taking a couple of aspirins and going to bed.

JOE : Yes, dear.

[*He goes briskly to the kitchen and returns presently with a glass of water neatly balanced on a plate. Crosses and knocks at bedroom door. GWEN opens it.*

And how is the patient ?

[GWEN takes glass of water, throwing an amused glance at the plate, and shuts the door again. JOE takes plate back to kitchen.

(Returning) Yes, I was saying—they're certainly wonderful houses. Why not come down and look at them one day ? Electric throughout, from top to bottom ; electric fires in every room ; electrically heated water on tap in the kitchen and the bathroom and every bedroom ; electric cooking, of course, *and* a refrigerator in the kitchen—in fact, absolutely the last word in labour-saving homes. 'Pon my word, it's impossible to think what a woman can find to do in such a house. As I said to Gwen at supper, she simply won't know what to do with herself all day. (With his mild laugh) "Never mind," she said : "the devil always finds work for idle hands." Ha, ha ! I couldn't help being amused.

[GWEN enters, closing the bedroom door gently behind her, and crosses for her handbag on the table. DICK comes down from window.

GWEN (to JOE) : We'll go, dear.—Dick, *do* be kind to her. You've hurt her terribly.

DICK (starts) : What ?

GWEN : Oh, I don't mean physically. The poor child has cried her heart out. I've never seen her in such a state. She's gone to bed. We'll catch the nine-fifty, Joe.

JOE : Er, yes. I've just been telling Dick he ought to come down and see the electric houses for himself——

GWEN : Yes, Angela is coming too. Try and manage this week-end, Dick : it will do you both good. Good-bye. Do be kind to her. She's only a kid after all. I don't think you have any idea how much she really loves you. (Puts her hand on his arm.) And don't take it to heart too

much ; that kind of row only happens once. Be sweet to her ! (*Goes.*)

JOE : So long, Dick.

DICK : Good-bye.

[*They go out. DICK drifts around the room, glancing once or twice at the bedroom door as if he would like to make overtures of peace. Then he picks up the newspaper listlessly, switches off the main lights, and drops into the armchair, beside which is the standard lamp. For a few moments he tries to concentrate on the paper, then throws it aside. The bedroom doors opens quietly. ANGELA enters timidly, in pyjamas and dressing-gown, and halts in the centre of the room.*

ANGELA (*with real sincerity*) : Dick—I'm sorry. It was my fault. (*DICK rises.*) I didn't mean any of the horrible things I said.

DICK (*with a movement to her*) : Angela——

ANGELA : Oh, Dick ! (*Runs to his arms.*)

DICK : Darling.

ANGELA : I'll never be like that again, Dick, never !

DICK (*strokes her hair*) : We've been fools, darling. It was just as much my fault.

ANGELA : I didn't mean any of the beastly things I said, Dick. I swear I didn't ! All the time—everything I said—I was trying to say the opposite—underneath. *Do* understand, darling. I was loving you all the time inside.

DICK : Perhaps it's as well we got it over. It probably had to come some time. We've been getting out of touch. I suppose that was my fault——

ANGELA : No, Dick, I can see it now ; it was just as much my fault. I was a fool. I want to tell you something, Dick. Sit down, darling.

[She pushes him down into the armchair and drops on her knees beside him.]

I want you to take it in, Dick. I'm not just saying it on impulse. I've thought about it lots of times really and I know what I'm saying. I *mean* it, every word of it——

DICK (*laughs*) : What is it, darling.

ANGELA : I do want to have a baby, Dick, and make a home for you. I'll chuck my job—to-morrow. I'll be the kind of wife you want me to be.

DICK (*bends over her*) : Angela.

ANGELA : I *mean* it, darling. I know now I've been a fool. I often thought about having a baby, and I always knew I'd like to really, but I told myself I'd rather wait two years. Now I know I'd like to have one to-morrow if I could.

DICK : Mm ! I'm afraid that's rushing it a bit.

ANGELA (*laughs and climbs on to his lap*) : Oh, darling, you are sweet to forgive me. (*Kisses him and snuggles down.*)

DICK : And you forgive me ?

ANGELA : You know I do. It was all so silly, really ; wasn't it, darling ?

DICK : Too silly to be allowed to happen again.

ANGELA : I know now *why* it happened. It began with me, when you said you wouldn't even see what the International Electric—but I mustn't say that or you'll think I'm blaming you again.

DICK : Perhaps I deserve some blame for that. It wouldn't do any harm to have a big firm's valuation. But in any case I won't have the final model ready for a month or so——

ANGELA : Well, we won't talk about it now, darling. It's all over and done with—I can't believe it ever happened.

[She curls up on his lap and draws her dressing-gown closer.]

DICK : Cold ?

ANGELA : Not really.

DICK : Sleepy ?

ANGELA : A bit.

DICK : You ought to be in bed, you know.

ANGELA : Please, I want to be tucked in.

DICK : Come along.

[He rises, lifting her in his arms.]

ANGELA : Oh, Dick, I do love you.

[She strokes his face and kisses him as he carries her to the bedroom.]

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

TIME : *A few months later.*

The scene is the reception-room of an all-electric house in Blissboro, a Garden City estate about thirty miles outside London. In back wall an open archway leads to hall, in the right of which can be seen the stairs, the hall-door being on the left (off). A casement window at the foot of the stairs looks on to a small front garden. In the room a long low window occupies nearly the whole of the back wall to the left of the archway : curtains drawn. Centre right, a door. Down left, a door. Centre left, an electric fireplace. The electric light fittings are very modern and arresting. An electric fan on pedestal in corner. The same furniture as in previous scene, with the addition of a radiogramophone.

The room is empty at the rise of the curtain. ANGELA comes down the stairs in a filmy evening dress. She leans out of casement window at foot of stairs and looks off, right. She comes in with a worried, puzzled expression. Then her spirits suddenly revive ; she switches on the radiogram and dances gaily for her own amusement. But she stops again just as suddenly, thinking, puzzled. A ring at hall-door. She goes. JOE and GWEN enter, also in evening dress.

GWEN : My dear, you look *too* lovely.

ANGELA (*examines GWEN's frock*) : You can't grumble. Can she, Joe ?

JOE (*gloomily*) : Good evening, Angela.

ANGELA : Oh, you don't sound very bright. Not in the mood for dancing ?

JOE : Oh, so-so. Dick ready ?

ANGELA : No. I'm fed up. Dick isn't back yet.

JOE : Not back !

ANGELA : I can't make it out—he's never been as late as this before—and he hasn't even rung up.

JOE (*peevish*) : Might have guessed as much. Trying to back out.

GWEN : Considering it's such a chance for *you* to meet the right people here, Angela, I think he might as least—

ANGELA : No, it isn't that, Gwen. He was quite keen about the dance this morning. And he said he might be a bit late because—what time does the I.E.C. shut ?

GWEN : Six.

JOE : But I thought he'd turned them down ?

ANGELA : So he did, but we had another letter this morning asking him to go and see them again. We couldn't *think* what for.

JOE : To offer him more, of course !

ANGELA : Well, no—at least, the letter said : “ The directors have another *suggestion* to make ”—not another “ offer.”

JOE : Oh. That's interesting.

GWEN : Of course, *I* think you were foolish to let him refuse the thousand.

ANGELA (*smiles*) : There's no “ letting ” with Dick where his business is concerned.

JOE : Ha ! I should think not ! Men have some privileges left.

GWEN : Far too many.

[ANGELA is conscious for the first time of a hostile atmosphere between them.]

ANGELA : Yes, Dick makes the final decisions in his business and I make the final decisions in the home. We always discuss things first,

but, once either of us makes our final decision, that's that. It's the only real basis of equality.

JOE (*to the ceiling*) : Quite. Provided a wife is *willing* to discuss things first with her husband—and doesn't conceal things.

ANGELA : Oh, quite.

GWEN : And provided a husband doesn't spy on his wife.

ANGELA : Oh, yes—of course—quite.

[*An awkward little pause.*]

JOE : I shall be interested to hear what their suggestion is.

ANGELA : Dick thought they might ask him to amalgamate with them in some way when he forms his own company.

JOE : Very likely. He'd agree to that, of course ?

ANGELA : I *think* so. He's not quite so keen to risk everything as he was. (*Smiles.*) I think he's developing a sense of parental responsibility. (*To GWEN*) By the way, I've decided to call him Douglas ; he's going to be a film star.

GWEN : You've decided it's going to be a "he," apparently.

ANGELA : If it isn't I'll send it back. Dick wants a boy too.

JOE : Dick must be very thrilled, Angela.

ANGELA : Rather. (*To GWEN*) So thrilled that he actually helped me to wash up during the week-end !

GWEN : So he ought, my dear.

ANGELA : All the same, it *was* sweet of him.

JOE (*to the ceiling again*) : Some husbands have been known to do *all* the washing-up on occasions—when the maid is out for the evening

and their wife is tired—(GWEN *giggles at his pomposity*)—or *says* she is.

ANGELA : I do wish Dick would come. His supper is nearly ruined.

JOE (*looks at his watch*) : If he's caught the seven-thirty he should be here in a few minutes. I'll tootle down to the station and meet him, Angela—save time.

[JOE *goes*. GWEN *smiles at* ANGELA.

ANGELA : A row ?

GWEN : It's his own fault. He read one of my letters—from Philip. Fortunately it didn't tell him much—except that Philip is in love with me and I've been to his flat.

ANGELA : Oh—he *must* have felt relieved. How did you explain ?

GWEN : Explain ? I was furious.

ANGELA : I should have thought Joe was the one to be furious.

GWEN : The best way to defend, my dear, is to attack. Who said that ?

ANGELA : Napoleon, I expect.

GWEN : Yes, he probably learned it from Josephine.

ANGELA (*looks at her for a moment*) : You *have* changed lately, Gwen. The way you talk about things—some things.

GWEN (*smiles cheerfully*) : Have I ? What things ?

ANGELA : Well—men, for instance.

GWEN : Men ? What men ?

ANGELA : Any men. Dick and Joe, for instance.

GWEN : I think Dick and Joe are two very nice husbands. They work hard, and pay the rent, and look after us well.

ANGELA : And that's all husbands are for ?

GWEN : Well, I wouldn't go as far as that, perhaps. But, after all, that's what husbands *like* doing. Joe simply adores his work in the Civil Service. He's perfectly happy the whole day reading letters from a man on the floor below him, and passing them on to a man on the floor above him. I agree with you, of course ; a man should be free to run his job and a woman should be free to run the home. And in their social lives they should both be free.

ANGELA (*with a look*) : Their social lives ?

GWEN : Well, you don't suggest that a husband should dictate to his wife about—well, her choice of friends ?

ANGELA : You mean, such as—you going to Philip's flat ?

GWEN (*shrugs*) : For example.

ANGELA (*hesitates*) : I don't know much about it, of course.

GWEN (*softly brazen*) : Oh, yes, you do. You know that Philip and I are lovers.

ANGELA (*turns away*) : Yes—I guessed you were. (*Turns back.*) And I think it's rotten of you, Gwen.

GWEN : Why ?

ANGELA : I think it's rotten of any woman to cheat her husband when he's decent to her.

GWEN : What do I cheat him of ? I don't take anything from Joe that I give to Philip. Joe and I——

ANGELA : Then why don't you tell him ?

GWEN (*stumped for a moment*) : I'm going to tell him. I'd have told him before—and I *wanted* to—if I hadn't felt he'd be a dog-in-the-manger about it. I know I'm not doing anything that affects my feelings for *him*—so why should he mind ?

ANGELA : You know he will, though.

GWEN : But why *should* he? We both realise that we're not lovers in the real sense any more. I shouldn't mind if *he* had an *affaire*—I wouldn't feel he was being unfaithful to me.

ANGELA (*half humorously*) : And to think that I used to look on you as a model wife. You're a menace to society.

GWEN : I dare say. There are a good many menaces to society going about to-day. You know as well as I do that lots of married couples "condone" each other's *affaires*.

ANGELA : Yes, the exceptions.

GWEN : Twenty years ago women like *you* were the exceptions. (ANGELA *blinks*.) Women who have *affaires before* marriage. Why should one be any more wrong than the other—especially if husband and wife both agree?

ANGELA : "If." I can't see many husbands ever agreeing.

GWEN (*airily*) : Oh, they will in time. They're coming round by degrees.

ANGELA : Perhaps all wives aren't like you, Gwen.

GWEN : Perhaps not—but I'm sure a good many *are*. I could mention half a dozen model wives straight off—women who've been married six or seven years and are still quite fond of their husbands—with two or three children perhaps— (She stops suddenly.) Oh, Angela, I'm sorry. I shouldn't talk like this to *you*. I forgot, my dear.

ANGELA : Don't be so damn soppy. Just because I'm going to have a kid myself, it doesn't mean I've gone all blah.

GWEN : But I can see it sounds beastly to you.

ANGELA : I just don't believe women are *made* like that. It's only natural, I suppose, that sex love should die down between two people sooner or later, but another kind of love can take its place—I've often heard married people say so—a deeper kind of love——

GWEN : Of course ; I'm not denying that ; but it doesn't compensate for the love that's gone.

ANGELA : Well, it ought to.

GWEN : But *why*, Angela ? *Why ought* it to ? It's a different kind of love altogether, however deep it may be. Why should it rule out a new romantic love with someone else—without making people fly apart and breaking up homes ?

ANGELA : Homes *do* get broken up, though.

GWEN : Exactly ! And if I broke up my home to-morrow—and went through the usual farce of divorcing Joe—and ran off and married Philip—I'd be quite a moral and respectable woman in the eyes of the world. And if I did the same thing again in a few years' time, and broke up another home to marry a third man, I'd still get away with it. But because I stick to my husband and children and look after them well, and run a home for them, then I'm being an immoral woman if I dare to enjoy a single hour of romantic love with another man. A menace to society—bah ! The real menace to society is the silly dog-in-the-manger morality that men still try to impose on us—and that *makes* people break up homes if they want to lead full, happy lives, as nature intends them to——

[DICK *enters by door down left. He looks worried and his hair is slightly dishevelled.*

ANGELA : Darling ! How on earth——! When did you get back ?

DICK : About an hour ago. You were upstairs——

ANGELA (*runs to him and kisses him*) : And you've been in there all the time !

DICK : Yes—I wanted to think. Hello, Gwen.

GWEN : We thought you'd been run over. We sent out a search-party—— (*A ring at hall-door.*) Here it is.

ANGELA (*running to open hall-door*) : But what's the news, darling ? Why didn't you ring up ? (*In hall, opening door to JOE*) He's back. He's been here all the time !

JOE (*entering*) : Well I'm dashed !

ANGELA : Oh, do tell us the news, darling !

DICK (*with a serious smile*) : It wasn't quite what I expected.

JOE : Ha, I was right ! They offered you two thousand ?

DICK : No—one of them did suggest twelve fifty, and I think I could get them to fifteen hundred, but that wasn't their main suggestion.

ANGELA : Darling, you *are* being mysterious ! What *did* they suggest ?

DICK (*watching her gravely*) : A job—in the company.

ANGELA : A job ?

DICK : They want me to join their research staff—at nine hundred a year.

JOE : My hat ! That's not to be sneezed at.

ANGELA : *And* buy the motor ?

DICK : Yes.

ANGELA : Oh ! (*Clasps her hands ecstatically.*)

GWEN : But how perfectly marvellous !

JOE : My dear chap, you're in clover !

DICK : I admit it's a good offer—if I was looking for a job.

JOE : Eh ? You're not going to *refuse* ?

DICK : Well, I don't happen to be looking for work, you see.

ANGELA : Dick !

JOE : You mean to say—a big firm like that—a job for life—

DICK : But I don't *want* a job for life.

ANGELA : Darling, you haven't refused already !

DICK : No, I've got to let them know to-morrow. I'll write to-night.

ANGELA : But you haven't *decided* already ?

DICK (*hesitates*) : Not actually, of course. I've thought it all out carefully, darling—

ANGELA (*backing from him*) : You *have* decided—before you even told me !

DICK : Now listen, darling—

ANGELA : That's why you hid in there—to think it out alone !

DICK (*bridling too*) : Well, naturally I wanted to think it out alone. Can't I even do my *thinking* alone ?

GWEN (*pacifically*) : Are you sure you've thought it out thoroughly, Dick ? (*He turns to her.*) It's not for me to intrude, of course ; but did you think of what it would mean to Angela to have security, now that the baby is coming ?

DICK (*simply*) : Of course.

ANGELA (*going to him again suddenly*) : Yes, darling, I'm sure you did. I'm sorry. (*Slips her hand into his. From now on she controls herself and is the submissive wife.*)

JOE : And what it will mean if you start on your own and go smash ?

DICK (*smiles*) : Yes, I thought of that too.

JOE : Then you're mad, my dear chap, that's all I can say.

DICK : I had that well rubbed into me to-day : one of the directors made several veiled threats during the interview.

ANGELA : Darling ! What kind of threats ?

DICK : Oh, about smashing me if I dared to market my motor in competition with theirs. Hinted they could compel the trade to boycott mine, and so on.

JOE : Ha, so they could too !

DICK (*shrugs, but is obviously a bit uneasy*) : To a certain extent perhaps—in certain areas——

JOE : Enough to put you in Carey Street, old man—unless you have pretty well unlimited capital to hold on.

DICK (*going up the room restlessly*) : I don't agree. There are ways of countering that. And there are other factors. *Value* is one. My motor is a better article—better value—and they know it ! That's why they want to buy me up.

JOE : But theirs is a better organisation—one of the most powerful in the country ; that's what you're up against—a vast organisation with unlimited resources. (*Preening himself modestly*) I think I may claim that we in the Civil Service have a deeper insight than most people into what I may call the tyrannical power of the trusts. The number of small firms that go bankrupt to-day because——

DICK (*pacing irritably*) : Yes, yes, yes, I know. But that's no reason why *I* should ; they don't *all* fail. Why shouldn't I be one of the successful ones ? Why, even the I.E.C. was a small firm once——

JOE : Ah, that's just the point, old man ! You've said it. That's just the difference between to-day

and yesterday. The whole tendency to-day is huge combines, colossal trusts and corporations, all interlocking with each other. You think you can swim against the tide, but you can't ; you'll find——

DICK : My God, you *are* an encouraging kind of friend.

JOE (*meekly*) : I'll say no more.

GWEN : That's hardly fair, Dick. We're *trying* to be friends to you. Joe is trying to see it from your point of view and I naturally see it from Angela's point of view. And I must say I do think you're being rather stubborn and selfish about it.

DICK : Thanks. When I want your opinion I'll ask for it. (GWEN *blinks*.) Now let's drop it. This isn't getting us into the mood for dancing.

ANGELA : I don't suppose you really want to dance, darling——

DICK : Yes, I do ; I feel like dancing all night. I must have a snack of food first, just a bite. Shan't be long. (*Goes.*)

ANGELA (*running after him*) : It's all ready, darling—— (*Goes.*)

JOE : Extraordinary chap. But I think we shook him.

GWEN : A good shaking is just what he wants, to teach him manners.

JOE : Poor Angela is disappointed.

[GWEN is silent, remembering their own quarrel and her policy of taking the offensive.]

Dashed hard luck on her. It's hardly playing the game to treat her like that.

GWEN (*haughtily*) : Do husbands ever play the game by their wives ?

JOE (*braces himself*) : It's no use your giving yourself airs, Gwen. You know perfectly well it's you who hasn't played the game between *us*. You had no business to go to that fellow's flat, however innocent you say it was.

GWEN (*opening her attack*) : Since when have you had the right to read my letters or choose my friends ?

JOE : We're talking about playing the game.

GWEN : Did it do you any harm ?

JOE : If you want to know, it's hurt me very much.

GWEN : How ? In what way hurt you ?

JOE : In the way that any man would be hurt to know that his wife was—accepting attentions from another man.

GWEN : In other words, common or garden jealousy.

JOE : Call it what you like—it's human nature.

GWEN : Your human nature, perhaps. My human nature sees nothing wrong in enjoying the company of other men as long as I don't neglect my duties as a wife to you. Have I ever done so ?

JOE : That's not my point.

GWEN : Well, it's *my* point. You're just being utterly selfish and small-minded about it. Because *you* don't "pay me attentions" any more, no other man must.

JOE : It doesn't strike you that *you're* being damn selfish ? Just because I'm tied to the office all day and feel tired sometimes when I come home in the evenings, you forget all the other things I've done for you. What about your dress allowance ? Have you forgotten that already ? I increased it only yesterday when you asked me.

GWEN : Naturally : your salary was increased last week.

JOE : But, good Lord, is a husband obliged to give his wife a definite proportion of his salary as dress allowance ?

GWEN : Perhaps not at present : but he should be, and he will be one day. And the country will save the hundreds of thousands of pounds that are spent on silly disputes in the law courts to-day.

JOE : You're just being deliberately tantalising and ungrateful. I've given you everything I can to make you happy, and I think you might show a little consideration for my feelings. Have I ever stinted you in any way, as far as my means allowed ?

GWEN : Have you ever wanted to stint me ?

JOE : No, I've always loved giving you things——

GWEN : Then don't be so virtuous about it.

JOE : There you are, that's all the thanks I get !

GWEN : I'm certainly not going down on my hands and knees to thank you for doing what most husbands are only too glad to do for their wives. And you *are* stinting me now, or trying to ; you want to stint my freedom. But you're not going to. So long as a wife performs her duties a husband has no right whatever to interfere in her social life.

JOE : There's *no* excuse for you gadding about with other men. You have a comfortable home, a home that gives you more leisure than nine women out of ten have, and——

GWEN : And I'm to sit and twiddle my thumbs in it all day. (*Laughs.*) You men really are the most ridiculous creatures. What's a labour-saving home for if it's not to set a woman free to

go out and enjoy herself when she wants to? You and Dick were talking the other evening about the Electric Age that's coming, when every woman will be able to do her housework in an hour a day. What do you think women are going to do with themselves for the rest of the day? Sit in their all-electric homes playing with the switches?

JOE : All this doesn't alter the fact that you *know* you were doing wrong in going to that fellow's flat. If you didn't you wouldn't have been so underhand about it ; you'd have told me frankly you were going.

GWEN (*in a humbler tone*) : I would have told you, Joe, if I had thought you wouldn't be silly about it.

JOE : But hang it all, Gwen, it's not being silly for a man to—well, to be jealous, if you like !

GWEN (*amicably*) : It's silly of *you* to be jealous. You ought to know it couldn't alter my feelings for you. So why should it alter your feelings for me ?

JOE : But—how would you like it if *I* came home one evening and told you I'd been to some girl's flat to supper ?

GWEN : I wouldn't mind.

JOE : What ?

GWEN : I wouldn't ; if it didn't alter your feelings for *me*. Why should I ? (*Rises and moves to him.*) Why should we have this selfish attitude towards each other ?

JOE : You mean to tell me that you don't care if I—mess about with other women ?

GWEN (*laughs*) : Well, why put it like that ? (*Lays her hand on his shoulder.*) Do *you* mean to tell *me* you don't know any woman that you'd like to have supper with sometimes ?

JOE : I—I might, but I don't intend to.

GWEN : Why ?

JOE : *Why ?*

GWEN : You're still fond of me, Joe, aren't you ?

JOE : You know I am.

GWEN : And you know I'm fond of you.

JOE : I hoped so.

GWEN : We're not "in love" with each other in the romantic sense any longer, but we do love each other in a different way, a deeper way perhaps.

JOE : Exactly. Then——

GWEN : Wait a moment. Would it make you love me any less if you had supper with another girl ? Of course it wouldn't. Then why should I be jealous ?

JOE : You really are the most extraordinary woman——

GWEN (*playing with the lapel of his coat*) : I'm not, dear. I'm just being sensible. And I believe you know one or two girls who—oh, you needn't look so shocked. Why *shouldn't* you ?

JOE : Really, Gwen——

GWEN : And I believe it would do us both a lot of good to see a little more of the opposite sex. I'm serious, darling. Marriage *does* make people stuffy. It would help us to appreciate each other more.

JOE : This is all very well, Gwen, but it is one of those theories that don't work out in practice. For one thing, there's the kiddies to be considered. You know how you adore them——

GWEN : Of course, darling ; but that's just what will make the theory work. It's *because* I

adore them so much that I know I could never get too fond of another man.

JOE (*reflects for a moment—then smiles*) : You know, I believe you're trying to lead me astray.

GWEN : And I believe you're really rather thrilled about it. Confess ! (*She gives him a quick little kiss as the door opens.*)

[ANGELA enters.]

ANGELA : Gwen, I'm sorry, but I do think Dick ought to have a little rest before we go to the dance. Would you mind awfully if we came on after you, in about an hour ?

GWEN : Of course, my dear.

JOE : How is he ? Still obstinate ?

ANGELA : I think we made him worse by us all going for him.

GWEN (*taking JOE's arm gaily*) : Yes, dear, we'd better leave them together. And we'll be able to get in a few dances before they come. You may even get one with Molly Sherbrook if we hurry.

JOE : Eh ?

GWEN (*laughs*) : Well, you know how quickly she gets booked up.

JOE : Really, Gwen—before Angela.

GWEN : Come along, my dear, I'm just dying to dance. We'll look out for you, Angela.

[*They go out, GWEN smiling cheerfully. She looks back over her shoulder and winks at ANGELA, and laughs at her obvious bewilderment.*

ANGELA's worried expression returns. *She takes a cigarette from box, changes her mind and puts it back again. Then she arranges the cushions for herself on the settee.*

ANGELA (*murmurs, as she jabs a cushion*) : Some women get away with anything.

[She is reclining listlessly on the settee when DICK enters.]

DICK : Shan't be long now—— Hello ! Gone ?

ANGELA : Yes, they seemed fed up waiting, so I told them we'd be along presently.

DICK : Sorry to mess things up——

ANGELA : There's no hurry, darling. The dance goes on until two.

DICK (*turning to hall*) : My things out ?

ANGELA : Yes—hand me that cushion, darling, please. (*He brings a small cushion from a chair : she raises her head listlessly for him to place it.*)

DICK : Tired ?

ANGELA : Oh, I'm all right—just a tiny bit of a headache—it'll be gone in a minute. The excitement, I suppose.

DICK : Poor darling—I'm sorry.

ANGELA (*slips her hand into his*) : It's not your fault, darling.

DICK : I'm afraid it is.

ANGELA : I shouldn't let myself build up silly hopes.

DICK (*looking down at her fondly*) : You're disappointed. I was afraid you would be. I wish —— (*Breaks off.*)

ANGELA (*making room for him on the settee*) : Yes, darling ? What do you wish ?

DICK (*sitting*) : I wish I could make you see how much I want to do what's best—best for both of us—and how sure I am that I can win—if you're *with* me.

ANGELA : Darling, of course I'll be with you. I have no choice.

DICK : That doesn't sound very like being with me.

ANGELA : Well, darling, I haven't, have I? Especially now.

DICK : You mean—— ?

ANGELA (*turning her head away*) : Oh, I don't want to sound beastly. I know it's hard for *you* to understand. . . .

DICK : I want to understand.

ANGELA : I was so happy all day—thinking about everything—the future—and the baby—and how I was helping you by having a baby—and making a home for you—everything was so bright and hopeful—and now it's all gone dark—and I can't *do* anything—I can't escape—I feel I'm in a cage.

DICK : Angela—don't talk like that—it hurts—terribly. (*Rises.*)

ANGELA : It hurts me too, Dick. (*She still holds his hand, looking up at him.*) But you can't blame me for having hopes—how can I help it, darling? When you left this morning I felt sure they were going to ask you to amalgamate with them, like you thought they would, and you seemed willing to——

DICK : Yes, I would have done. I even suggested a working arrangement with them. But——

ANGELA : Did you, darling? Tell me. (*Draws him down again.*)

DICK : Oh, it didn't come to anything. They wouldn't listen to any suggestion but their own.

ANGELA : In a sense they *have* asked you to amalgamate with them, haven't they?—by asking you to join their company. And there must be *something* in what Joe said, darling, about their power to smash you if you try to compete with them.

DICK (*uneasy again*) : Oh, yes, I know they're—pretty powerful. It will be a fight—at first——

ANGELA (*suddenly clinging to him*) : Oh, Dick, *must* you risk it ? *Must* you, darling ? *Must* you ? Doesn't anything else matter ? Our future ? Our home ? Our baby that isn't born yet——

DICK (*tense*) : Don't. I've been through all that. It hasn't been easy, Angela——

ANGELA : Then *why*, Dick, *why* must you ? *Why* ?

DICK : Because it's my *chance* ; if I don't take it I'll regret it all my life.

ANGELA : But you don't *know*, darling, if you *take* it you may regret it all your life. You may lose *everything* ! And they're offering you something *certain*—something you never expected—and fifteen hundred pounds——

DICK (*harshly*) : Don't, Angela ! Don't ask me again.

ANGELA : And we could save up—I'd be economical—I swear I would—I'll do all the housework myself—in a few years we could save——

DICK (*struggling to free himself*) : You're asking me to give up everything I've dreamed of——

ANGELA : I'm *not*, darling—only for a little while——

DICK : —to sell myself completely——

ANGELA : —a few years, Dick—until we're safe—until the baby is safe.

DICK (*tearing himself from her*) : You don't know what you're doing. If I give in to you it will kill something in me ! You're asking me to abandon my ambitions——

ANGELA : I'm *not*—only to *wait*, Dick—to wait a little longer——

DICK : To wait ! I've been waiting for years—ever since I came to London—and now I have

a chance to achieve what I've been waiting for—to achieve it on a big scale. Even if I go on waiting, saving every penny, it will be three or four years before I can buy a farm of any size and stock it and equip it on the lines I want to——

ANGELA : But, darling, when I first met you——

DICK : Besides, I want to get back ! You don't know what it means to me—it grows on me every day ! Even this morning, going up in the train—watching them haymaking in the fields—the sight of it—the sound of it—the smell of it—and you want me to forget it all and sell myself to the city.

ANGELA (*suddenly verging on tears*) : I don't—you *know* I don't ! You're only thinking of yourself ! You didn't talk like this when *I* gave in to *you*—when you wanted me to make a home for you—and begged me to have a child—this is the thanks I get—I don't count any more——

[*She burst into tears. DICK comes down to table, torn within himself.*]

I gave up everything for you—everything ! My job—my freedom—my independence—to be the kind of wife you want me to be—and now you don't care——

DICK : Angela——

ANGELA : You don't, you don't ! You're only thinking of yourself. I don't count—our child doesn't count—and I can't escape—you've trapped me.

DICK (*sits heavily at table*) : Oh, God—you don't see—you don't realise—it will kill something in me.

ANGELA (*sobbing hysterically*) : I see too well—when it's too late ! You know I can't escape ! You've trapped me ! You've cheated me !

DICK (*with a groan of surrender*) : Oh, Christ. (*He stares vaguely at the table.*) All right. (*He rises and stares round the room.*) All right.

[*He goes back, and climbs the stairs wearily.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE : *The same as previous scene.*

TIME : *About a year later. Saturday, noon.*

An elegant perambulator stands just inside the archway leading to hall. There are one or two new articles of furniture, including a very modern writing bureau, on which stands a phone. The hall-door is wide open and the hall is flooded with sunshine. The curtains are now drawn back from the long window, revealing a neat garden terminated by a box hedge.

When the curtain rises DICK is sprawling lazily in an armchair. There is an air of resigned contentment about him. ANGELA comes down the stairs carrying the baby.

ANGELA (*talking to baby*) : Now there's going to be no nonsense to-day, my chicken. You're going out in the lovely sunshine, and if you don't like it you can lump it. Do you hear, Douglas Fairbanks? (*Kisses him.*) Come to daddy first while mummy gets our pram ready. (*Coming down to DICK*) Just for a second, darling. (*Puts baby in his arms and goes back to arrange pram.*)

DICK (*tickling baby's nose*) : Hello, Snooks.

ANGELA (*back at pram*) : What a heavenly day, darling ! Gwen has had a marvellous fortnight for her holiday—if they had the same weather. I'll bet she's looking fit. Funny how quiet Joe has been during the fortnight—he's looked so

vague and lost, hasn't he? I wonder what he *really* feels?

DICK : A worm, I should think.

ANGELA : Oh, I don't know ; after all, he's supposed to be going away himself on Monday—so Gwen said—with some girl from a bookshop in town. And there was an article in the paper yesterday *advising* husbands and wives to take their holidays separately.

DICK : With someone else?

ANGELA (*surprised*) : Well, it didn't say so, but I imagined it meant that.

DICK : And you agree, eh?

ANGELA : You know I don't *really*, darling. But I *am* beginning to think if two people are happier with that kind of arrangement—well, it's their affair after all. (*Comes down for baby.*) Now, big boy.

[*The phone rings. She crosses and answers it.*]

Hello? Hello, Gwen! We were just talking about you. Had a marvellous time? I'll bet you did. (*Listens.*) Yes, it's been baking here too. Where did you go? (*Turns to Dick*) Darling, they motored through Millingham and saw Long Meadow Farm! (*Listens again, and her expression changes*) Oh? why? what's wrong? (*Listens.*) But what's *wrong*, Gwen? (*Listens, quite perturbed.*) Gwen, what *is* the matter? You sound as if you've seen a ghost. (*Listens.*) Of course, my dear, come round. Yes, of course. (*Puts down receiver thoughtfully.*) She sounds dreadfully upset about something.

DICK : Holiday not such a success after all.

ANGELA : Apparently not. But fancy her seeing Long Meadow Farm, darling!

DICK (*murmurs*) : Yes, it must be looking fine just now.

ANGELA (*crossing for baby*) : Come along, Master Duggie. Did you notice he's got heavier, darling? He's put on two whole ounces since five o'clock yesterday!

DICK (*sardonically*) : Time you weighed him again, isn't it?

ANGELA (*coaxingly*) : Darling, it's *such* a lovely day. Couldn't you just take him out for a little while—half an hour only?

DICK (*frowns*) : I thought we'd settled that point?

ANGELA : But, darling, it isn't as if I ask you other days; Saturday morning is such a busy time for me. I haven't even finished my shopping yet. Just while I'm getting the lunch ready, Dick?

DICK : I'm not doing any pram-pushing. (*Reads paper.*)

ANGELA (*sighs and takes baby to pram*) : Oh, well, we must stay in our pram in the garden then, since daddy won't take us out. (*Puts baby in pram and arranges it.*) Our daddy is too ashamed to be seen wheeling our pram. Lots of other daddies in Blissboro take their babies out, but *our* daddy thinks it isn't manly to be seen wheeling a pram alone, not even a lovely pram like ours—

DICK (*throws his paper down angrily and leaps to his feet*) : Angela! Am I to have this for the rest of my life?

ANGELA (*innocently*) : Have what?

DICK : This babbling!

ANGELA (*wide-eyed*) : I mustn't even talk to my baby now?

DICK : Well, can't you do it without harping on things and being a martyr?

ANGELA (*comes down slowly*) : I think you're a beast to say that. Am I being a martyr because

I'm still doing without a maid and have no one to help me with baby when I'm busy? If *you* won't take him out——

DICK : But we've been over this a dozen times ! I tell you it's *not my job* to push a pram.

ANGELA : But that's what's so silly. Lots of men push prams to-day——

DICK : I don't care how many men——

ANGELA : And the other day when we were out together you *did* push it part of the way.

DICK (*shrugs*) : I pushed it up a hill to help you when you were tired.

ANGELA : And you didn't mind doing that, to help me ?

DICK : Naturally.

ANGELA : Yet you won't do it this morning when it would help me much more ? I just don't understand.

DICK : And you'll keep this up, I suppose, until you *do* understand ?

ANGELA (*sadly*) : I'll never understand.

DICK (*turning abruptly*) : Oh—that's honest, anyway ! (*He goes out angrily, down right, with*) You'd better learn to.

[ANGELA goes back to pram.

ANGELA (*to baby*) : Never mind, darling. Some other day. Daddy will take us out one day. And now we'll go in the garden while mummy finishes her shopping.

[*She takes pram out to garden and returns. Crossing to telephone, she dials a number and proceeds to "finish her shopping."*

(*On phone : in her brightest manner*) Good morning, Mr. Duncan. Mrs. Shale speaking . . . I'm very well, thank you. Yes, isn't it glorious ? . . . To-day I want : half a pound of back rashers and

half a pound of streaky ; half a dozen cooking eggs and half a dozen new laid. . . . Yes, I'm sure they are. . . . Two pounds of lump sugar and two pounds of granulated. . . . Yes, I suppose I'd better have two pounds of castor as well. . . . Half a pound of fresh butter . . . Oh, I *always* have fresh. And half a pound of cooking butter. *And* a pound of tea. . . . No, the two and eight. . . . That's all, thank you. . . . No, not to-day. . . . No, I have jam, thank you. . . . Well, yes, perhaps I'm getting a bit low in marmalade : a pound pot will do. . . . Can I have these round this morning, please ? . . . No, thank you, nothing else. . . . Yes, quite sure, thank you. . . . Well, just half a pound of coffee then, the three shillings. . . . Oh, the three shillings is quite good, I think. . . . Yes, but it's really *quite* good. . . . Well, I'll try the three and four just this time : half a pound. . . . No, that is all, thank you. And you'll send them round this morning ? . . . Thank you. . . . Good morning.

[As she puts down the receiver, GWEN passes the long window and enters quickly. Her smile and her air of exuberant self-confidence are gone. She seems quite bewildered.]

GWEN : Hello, Angela. I *had* to come.

ANGELA : Hello. What's the trouble ?

GWEN : I can't believe it, Angela. It's Joe.

ANGELA : Joe. What about him ?

GWEN : Well, he's— (*Sits down.*) I *can't* believe it.

ANGELA : Believe what ?

GWEN : He's gone.

ANGELA : Gone ? What do you mean, Gwen ?

GWEN : He's just gone.

ANGELA : With the woman from the bookshop in town ?

GWEN : No, he was supposed to go with her on Monday, but he went this morning, alone. He left me a letter—saying he's gone for good ! He says he's in love with her and wants to marry her !

ANGELA : *Joe !*

GWEN : I know, I can't believe it ! Except that you know how weak he is—she must have got round him. He hasn't even left me an address, so I won't know where he is for a fortnight !

ANGELA : Good heavens, you gave me a fright—I thought you meant he'd gone in the river or something.

GWEN : I could have forgiven him that. But to go without leaving me an address !

ANGELA : Do you mean he—wants you to divorce him ?

GWEN (*near to tears*) : He wants to divorce *me*—he says he's filed a petition already ! I can't believe it, Angela ! That *proves* it was her doing, doesn't it ?

ANGELA (*quite nonplussed*) : My dear, I'm terribly sorry.

GWEN (*calming herself and trying to be rational about it*) : You see, I never suspected, Angela. When he first told me about her he said he was chiefly interested in her mind—you know how fond he is of reading, and she used to get special books for him. But I went to see her one afternoon when I was in town—I paid three and sixpence for a novel to have a look at her—and when I saw her I believed him. It just shows how weak he is. But he *can't* divorce me, Angela, can he ? I mean, *he* condoned *my* affair, and the law doesn't allow that. You could be a witness, Angela, couldn't you ?

ANGELA (*shying at it*) : Me ? A witness to what ?

GWEN : Well, *you* know he didn't mind me going away with Philip.

ANGELA : Well, I don't really, Gwen—only what *you* told me. Joe never told me—I often wondered what he really felt.

GWEN (*alarmed*) : But—well, Dick must know ! He'd have said something to Dick, I'm sure he would, something that would count as evidence——

ANGELA : I don't think he did, Gwen.

GWEN : Where *is* Dick ? I can't bear this uncertainty. One of you *must* have known—you're the only two people who *could* know ! Where is he ? I shall hate asking him—I know he never liked me much——

ANGELA (*crossing dubiously to door down right*) : He's in a pretty rotten mood this morning. (*Opens door.*) Darling. Gwen is here. She'd like to speak to you.

[GWEN *pulls herself together* as DICK enters.]

GWEN (*as charmingly as she can*) : Hello, Dick ! How are you ?

DICK : Hello. Had a good holiday ?

GWEN : Yes, lovely, thanks. The country is looking beautiful—and I told Angela, we motored past Long Meadow Farm. What a lovely old place ! (*DICK crosses in silence, waiting for more.*) Oh, and I heard a most wonderful compliment paid to your father. We had lunch at the village pub, and a lot of sweet old men—farm workers, I suppose—were being terribly excited about the auction and wondering if anyone would buy the farm—and one dear old thing said it was a pity “ Farmer Shale ” had to give up ; they'd never have “ the likes of him again.”

DICK : What auction ?

GWEN : Didn't you know ? Oh, I took it for granted you'd know. There are posters on all the gates and barn doors for miles around. It's on Monday——

ANGELA (*to DICK, who is staring at GWEN*) : Darling, they must have failed, the people who had it after you. You always said they would.

GWEN : I was certain you'd know all about it——

DICK (*with sudden, queer anger*) : Then why did you want to tell me ? Why did you bring me out to tell me this ?

ANGELA : Darling ! She wants to tell you something else too.

GWEN (*with an effort*) : Yes, I wondered if—well, you know I've been away with someone, Dick, don't you ?

DICK : Well ?

GWEN : And you know that Joe—didn't mind ?

DICK : I'm damn' sure he minded. So are you. Go on.

GWEN : Oh, he didn't, Dick, you must know he didn't——

DICK (*his strange subterranean rage swelling*) : I don't know ! What's it all about ? What the hell has this to do with Long Meadow Farm ?

ANGELA : Nothing, darling. You don't understand ! Gwen is——

DICK (*waving her to silence : to GWEN*) : What is it, then ? Speak out ! What are you trying to tell me ?

GWEN (*rather cowed*) : I—I only thought you might know—what Joe thought about me going away——

DICK : He thought what any man would think—any man who doesn't want a whore for a wife——

ANGELA : *Dick !* Dick, what's wrong with you ?

DICK : He thought what *I* think of you—and that's that you're nothing but a kept woman——

ANGELA : Dick, how dare you ! How *can* you say such——

DICK : Shut up ! (*To GWEN, who is backing up to hall, completely cowed*) I *do* say it ! A kept harlot—one of the new tribe of married harlots that are pestering society to-day—and dragging men down——

GWEN (*in a weak effort to rally*) : You'll be sorry for this——

DICK (*raging*) : Get out—get out of my house !

ANGELA : Dick, you're *mad* !

DICK : Get out on the streets, where you belong !

GWEN : Oh, God ! (*She buries her face in her hands and goes quickly out into the sunlight.*)

ANGELA (*running after her*) : Oh, Gwen ! Gwen, *darling* !

[*They go past the long window out of sight. DICK paces the room, running his hands through his hair characteristically. He cools down quickly. Then sits down, with a queer dazed expression on his face, as if trying to remember how that wild little scene came about. Presently he rises again and stands quite still, thinking. And after that his actions can only be indicated by the statement that a single obsessing thought is searing his brain : " Long Meadow Farm for sale ! " One moment he is staring out of the window, the next he is striding around the room, the next he is making rapid calculations on a piece of paper. Suddenly he turns and goes out quickly, left, and after a few moments returns with a very old leather satchel, the contents of which he empties on the table :*

letters, drawings, and a large parchment map of Long Meadow Farm. He extracts a particular letter and, crossing to the phone, dials TRU.

DICK (*on phone*): Hello. Trunks? . . . I want Millingham 31. . . . Yes. Millingham, Dorset. . . . Blissboro 169. . . . Shale. . . . Will it take long? . . . Good. Thanks. (*Hangs up.*)

[He opens out the map of Long Meadow Farm, which has many intriguing patches of colour on it : reds, greens, browns. As he pores over it his face is transformed, eyes blazing with a new hope. He puts it down suddenly, goes to the telephone directory on the bureau and searches for a number, and dials again.]

(*On phone*) Hello. Great Western? Enquiries, please. . . . Hello. Can you tell me a good train to Millingham, Dorset? . . . Yes, to-day. . . . Two ten? And the next? . . . Four twenty-five? Thanks. (*Hangs up.*)

[He looks at clock on mantelpiece, makes a mental calculation, and goes back to map. He is completely absorbed in it when ANGELA returns.]

ANGELA : I do think it was rotten of you, Dick !

DICK (*mutters*) : I want to be alone. Don't disturb me.

ANGELA : It's all very well to talk like that after—

DICK (*leaps to his feet*) : You heard what I said !

ANGELA : What on earth is the matter with you? Good God——!

[The phone rings. ANGELA turns to it, but DICK almost snatches it out of her hand.]

DICK (*on phone*) : Hello. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Hello, is that Mr. Chandler? . . . Oh, good. This is Dick Shale speaking. . . . Shale. . . . No, Shale. Dick Shale of Long Mea—that's right.

. . . Yes, I expect it's a surprise. . . . Yes. . . .
Yes, it's a long time. . . . I'm fine, thanks. . . .
Yes, I've just heard, that's why I'm phoning ;
I remembered you acted for father when *we*
were sold up. . . . Yes, can you give me any
particulars ? . . . Yes ? . . . Yes ? . . . No reserve ?
. . . In lots ? . . . Good, that's what I hoped. . . .
Yes. . . . Nothing sold privately ? . . . Well, I
thought I might buy some.

ANGELA (*gasps and comes to his side*) : Dick !

DICK (*growls like a savage animal*) : Go away . . . !
(*On phone*) What ? . . . It's grand of you to say
so ; I've always *wanted* to come back. . . . Can
you give me any idea of prices ? . . . Yes
Yes. . . . What were they breeding ? . . . And
the crops, what were they like ? . . . Yes, I knew
they couldn't do it. . . . Of course. How many
acres ? . . . I see. But what kind of price ? . . .
How *much* on mortgage ? . . . Oh, no, I couldn't
reach that figure. But listen ! (*Leans over and
grabs map from chair excitedly.*) If I could get the
Farm House and the lower paddock, with the
fields running across to Glam's Corner this
side of the valley, taking in the orchard, and a
bit of pasture between the river and Mucky
Cross, with the two new barns that father put
up . . . What ? . . . Oh, well, it doesn't matter,
I can run up my own barns. What kind of price
do you think ? . . . What ? . . . Yes Yes. . . .
No, of course not. . . . Yes ! . . . (*Beginning to
boil with excitement*) Yes, I could manage that,
with the mortgage ! I've got a bit more in the
bank, but I want to keep a few hundred for
electrical equipment. . . . Yes, I've got plans for
putting in—

ANGELA : Dick !

DICK : Shut up !

ANGELA : For heaven's sake—

DICK : Go to hell ! (*On phone, with unconscious*

humour) It's all right, I was talking to my wife. . . . Yes, I've been married about a year now. . . . Well, listen. Can I see you this evening? I'm coming down by the two-ten. . . . That's grand of you. . . . Thanks. . . . Yes, I'll come straight to your house. . . . Yes. . . . Good-bye.

[He hangs up receiver and rises exultantly. Then he turns and looks thoughtfully at ANGELA. In an effort to conceal the sudden qualms that are springing in her she returns his look with affected sauciness. Deep down in her she knows that her day of "equality" is over, but she is trying to hide the fact from herself.]

ANGELA : It all sounds frightfully interesting, but if you think I'm going to bury myself in the country you're very much mistaken.

DICK : I hadn't thought about it.

ANGELA : Then you'd better begin to think about it.

DICK : Yes, we'll both have to think a bit in the next few days. This means I may be able to buy a bit of the farm. And it will mean sacrifices—I'll have to sell this house. So think hard. You may be right; it's not an easy life for a woman. I'll be back on Tuesday. *(Suddenly alert)* Now, where's my brown suitcase? In the attic? *(Goes quickly.)*

ANGELA : Dick, you don't know what you're doing! *Nothing on earth* will induce me——

DICK *(bounding up the stairs)* : No time for "discussions"!

[ANGELA comes down the room, her saucy defiance giving place to other and deeper feelings. She resorts to the inevitable cigarette. Goes up to hall again and listens to the sound of DICK packing. Comes back, smoking like a furnace. She is already beginning to think hard. Crosses to telephone, hesitates, and dials. When she speaks she keeps her voice low, and glances

frequently over her shoulder to make sure that DICK does not return.

ANGELA (*on phone, a new note of timidity in her voice*) : Hello, Gwen. Are you feeling better? . . . Oh, good. Don't worry, dear, it will all come right. . . . He was all het up, Gwen, he didn't mean it ; it was telling him about Long Meadow that excited him. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, dear. . . . Me ? *I'm* all right ! . . . I *sound* queer ? . . . Oh, *quite* all right. . . . I wondered, Gwen, if you'd like to come round to-night. I mean, I expect you'll be feeling a bit miserable. You could sleep here if you like. . . . No, he's thinking of running down to Millingham, just to watch the auction. . . . Yes, we've just been discussing it together. . . . Yes, I thought it would be nice for him to have a few days in the country. . . . Yes. . . . Wait a moment, hold on !

[DICK comes charging down the stairs and into the room. He grabs up the parchment map, glancing swiftly round the room, and goes to one of the drawers in the bureau at which ANGELA is seated. She rises haughtily and stands aside to give him access to it. He takes a cheque-book, pass-book, and some papers from it and goes out again, glancing back at her suspiciously as he goes up the stairs.]

(*On phone again, low*) Yes, well come round to supper, Gwen. . . . Do. I'll expect you about seven. . . . (*Very tentatively, with a cautious glance over her shoulder*) And, Gwen ; by the way, I suppose you didn't happen to buy any—any picture postcards or things when you were passing through Millingham ? . . . Oh, I just thought it would be interesting to see them if you had. Dick's old home, you know : I've never seen it.

[DICK appears stealthily on the stairs, listening.]

Oh, yes, it must be *quite* a small village from what he's told me about it. . . . Oh, quite. . . .

What? . . . Oh, yes, I'm sure it's awfully healthy. And I expect they have a cinema to cheer them up in the winter? . . . My dear, there's *bound* to be ; only the tiniest villages don't have cinemas to-day. . . . I suppose you didn't have much time to notice the shops? . . . *What? . . . Only one shop?*

[Dick *smiles and steals upstairs again as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

